THE MURPHYS OF BALLYSTACK

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2016

https://archive.org/details/murphysofballyst00pear

MH3023

THE MURPHYS OF BALLYSTACK

BY

MARY B. PEARSE

Dublin
M. H. GILL & SON, LTD.
50 UPPER O'CONNELL STREET
1917

PR
6031
.E95
M86
1917

PRINTED AND BOUND IN IRELAND

BY

M. H. GILL & SON, LTD.

DUBLIN

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	The Murphys' Store	7
II.	The Murphys' House	19
III.	The Murphys' Caravan Holiday	27
IV.	Some Motor Accidents	40
V.	"The Play's the Thing"	57
VI.	"Geese"	71
VII.	The O'Grady's New Maid	85
VIII.	The Rehearsal	102
IX.	A Mistake	115
X.	A Christmas Party at Ballystack	131
XI.	A Visit to Coolcrannach	159
XII.	Barney makes Some Calls	184
XIII.	Barney's Dinner Party	207
XIV.	"Until we Meet Again!"	232

THE MURPHYS OF BALLYSTACK

CHAPTER I

THE MURPHYS' STORE

THE Murphys were the most notable people in the charming little village of Ballystack. They kept a kind of general stores, and sold everything that any rational being could reasonably want, and a great many other things which no sane person could *possibly* want. Mrs. Murphy always maintained that " The Stores " equalled, if they did not surpass, the very best shops in Dublin, even those in Grafton Street or O'Connell Street. For the Murphys were city people, having migrated from the town to the country because Mrs. Murphy had grown tired of smoke and noise.

In the largest window of the store was a card, and printed on it in bold type the following announcement : " Fresh eggs received daily, paraffin oil sold here." The first part of the announcement was not strictly veracious, inasmuch as the eggs were generally conspicuous by their absence. When they *did* honour the store by their gracious

presence they made the fact known in a peculiarly disagreeable manner. In fact, the unlucky buyer was always obliged to beat a precipitate retreat from the shop! Mr. Murphy would then spend a *mauvais temps*, which, interpreted in choice English, means "a bad quarter of an hour," and into "Irish" means "the very divil of a time." But Mr. Murphy had what is known as a "slutherin'" tongue, having kissed the Blarney Stone no less than six times; so he generally succeeded in inducing the would-be purchaser to come back, and buy *something*. But one unlucky day, when eggs were scarce, Pat Casey sallied forth to capture one for Friday's dinner; for a more God-fearing man than Pat wasn't in the four provinces of Ireland, nor even in the fifth province of Ringsend, near Dublin. Pat received the usual pleasant surprise; but the end didn't work out quite as usual. He had a caustic tongue; and when Mr. Murphy began to explain matters, Pat was ready for him.

"To my sarten knowledge, Mr. Murphy," said Pat, sternly, "that is the thirteenth egg that burst itself, for all the world like a German bomb-shell, before the dacent customers av this shop! That's on week-days. Mebbe they do be doin' it on Sundays as well; bud I hope they have the common dacency to behave thimselves on the day av rest. An' where the dickens do they be comin' from at all, at all? Tell me *that*, Mr. Murphy!"

But Mr. Murphy didn't tell him. He merely remarked that it was a fine day, and retired into

the shop. Later on, Jamesy O'Farrell saw him standing behind the counter, with a bottle pressed to each nostril, and an expression of acute horror on his face. These bottles were labelled in one place, "Real Killarney Violet Perfume"; and in another place, "Guaranteed British Manufacture," and in yet a third place, "Made in Germany." This confusion of titles used to lead strangers to believe that the proprietor of the shop was either drunk or insane; but on a closer acquaintance with Ballystack, and its people, they would see things in a different light. Ballystack is an exceedingly cosmopolitan village, with a sprinkling of all nations residing there. So whenever Mr. Murphy wished to sell some perfume, he simply turned a different side of the bottle upwards. Then the buyer and seller exchanged ideas on politics, and Murphy surreptitiously tore off the remaining labels. The purchaser went away satisfied, and Murphy was *perfectly* content to pocket the money.

"Sure, Fr. John," said the versatile merchant, when the parish priest tried to point out that such a course of business was not honest; "business is business, an' 'tis only an exchange of names; an' a fair exchange is no robbery, they say. 'Tis good violet scent, right enough, an' 'twas yourself that told us how all the flowers came from the Garden of Eden, before the flood destroyed them."

Needless to say, such was *not* the priest's theology; but he was completely nonplussed by the resourceful Mr. Murphy, who continued to

sell the cosmopolitan violet perfume, first grown in the Garden of Eden.

The chief articles of merchandise in the stores were small, perfectly useless paper fans, and windmills (which dissolved as soon as touched), and villainous-looking toy alligators, running on four wheels. These wheels invariably came off, and then the village children swallowed them with great relish. In fact, Dr. Wilson was, like the earth, in "perpetual motion," saving choking babies from destruction. At first, the people suspected that the doctor was in league with Mr. Murphy, for the alligators certainly brought him dozens of patients; but this theory was abandoned because of a strange incident :—

One fine morning, when Dr. Wilson was operating upon the same unfortunate infant for the sixth time, he lost his temper completely.

"Why, in the name of common sense, woman!" he exclaimed, "don't you burn those *abominable* reptiles, and get baby a Teddy Bear to play with? These monstrosities are death-traps, ma'am!"

"Is it the allegations ye want me to desthroy?" asked Mrs. McGrath, in amazed reproach, "an' they costin' tuppence apiece!"

"Do you care more for twopence, than for your child's life?" roared the goaded doctor.

"Oh, God betune us an' all harm!" exclaimed the scandalised Mrs. McGrath, "I don't, indeed! But, Docther, darlin', the cratur loves them little shaneys, an' 'ill play wid nothin' else; an' sure, God's good."

"Yes!" returned Dr. Wilson, shortly, "God *is* good, but He has nothing to do with the wheels of alligators."

Mrs. McGrath was deeply shocked, and she said to Mrs. Mulligan afterwards, that "the docther, God forgive him, was a haythen an' a savage, an' was goin' to the duce! First he tould her that she was murdherin' her own Paudeen, an' thin he used sich language as put the heart across in her!"

But the doctor raided the house, and threw all the offending alligators out through the window. The next morning, however, to his unspeakable chagrin, he found these same atrocities fixed conspicuously in Mr. Murphy's shop window. They were painted black, and otherwise disguised, but the doctor's quick eyes recognised them. Each reptile was labelled thus: "Antient Antiques, guaranteed one hundred years old, from the oldest bank of the Nile." So Dr. Wilson was completely crushed by Mr. Murphy's *business* methods, as the good priest had been before him.

I have said that Mr. Murphy's shop was a *general* stores. The only thing he did *not* sell was a white elephant, and even if he were asked for one, he would not get it, as a famous London firm did. He once remarked to Mrs. Murphy, that "he didn't think elephants, white or black, would sell well in Ballystack, pigs being a more profitable investigation."

"I suppose you mean 'investment,'" said Mrs. Murphy, who was a very genteel lady, and who,

as she herself often remarked, always minded her "p's" and "q's."

"If you *know* what I mean, what do you want to catch me up in what I say?" inquired Mr. Murphy irritably.

Mr. Murphy was always touchy about his grammar and general education, because he knew well that his wife and daughters rather "fancied" themselves as being very much his superiors in this respect.

"You might buy an elephant, and have it in stock. You could sell it cheap at one of the sales," said Mrs. Murphy, gravely. She knew as much about business as "superior" people usually do.

"I don't know whether 'twould be in the spring or autumn that people want elephant soup or elephant rides!" retorted Mr. Murphy, sarcastically. "Do you take your husband for a wild-beast tamer, woman?" he added with strong indignation.

But Mrs. Murphy declined to enlighten him on the point. She sailed majestically away, remarking as she went that it was taming he wanted himself; that if she hadn't the patience of Job she couldn't put up with him; that she was *utterly* at a loss to imagine why she ever married him; and that as far as she could see, the wildest elephant that ever rampaged the desert was a slaughtered lamb in comparison to himself.

Then she took a car to the nearest town, and ordered a new bonnet, just to show that she would not be imposed upon by anybody; while Mr.

Murphy consulted one of Cook's guides, to ascertain the price of a single ticket to America. Mr. Murphy could get the better of his customers, the doctor, and even the parish priest himself, and yet he could never get the better of his own wife. But there happened to be an American tourist outside, who overheard the dialogue between Mr. and Mrs. Murphy; and, being a bit of a wag, he strolled in, and told Mr. Murphy that he wanted a white elephant.

"Bedad," said that gentleman, with more force than politeness, "'tisn't a white elephant ye want, but brains, a bhuachaill! But I've heard there's scarcity of that commodity across the Herring Pond! If you'll step across to Mat Flannagan's beyant, ye'll find what ye want. He's just after killin' the finest sheep between here an' Dublin Castle, an' he'll let ye have the brains cheap, I'll go bail, for 'tis himself always had the open hand!"

But the American suddenly remembered that he might miss his train, and hurriedly withdrew, leaving Mr. Murphy master of the situation.

But now we come to the second announcement in the shop window. Well, there wasn't a man, woman or child in Ballystack who couldn't vouch for its veracity. The severest attack of catarrh could not prevent the olfactory nerves from discerning the presence of paraffin oil in that shop! In fact, everything that came out of Murphy's Stores simply *reeked* with it. Once, indeed, there was almost a serious accident because of it.

Fr. John O'Brien, who was an humble, thrifty soul, extremely partial to herrings, went off one evening to the Stores to purchase his supper. He bought a fine pair of kippers, and started home again in a leisurely fashion. The Reverend Miles McKenna, the Protestant minister of Ballystack, rode past the priest with a cordial salute, for they were great friends. Mr. McKenna, when turning a bend in the road, looked back, and to his unspeakable horror perceived that his reverend friend was in flames. Immediately turning his horse, he galloped back to the rescue. He found the unhappy priest vainly endeavouring to put out the fire, and, at the same time, frantically ejaculating in Irish. The minister at once took off his great riding cloak, and flung it around Fr. John, thus extinguishing the flames.

"In the name of goodness, Fr. John," exclaimed Mr. McKenna, "what has happened?"

"Happened!" echoed the priest, excitedly; "Happened is it? I should think it would be obvious to the most limited intelligence what has happened! I've gone on fire, that's what's happened! I cannot possibly imagine why! It never happened to me before, and I sincerely hope, never will again! It's—it's—a most distressing and—and—er—*unorthodox* occurrence! In fact," he added, incoherently, "I'm afraid it's against the law for a priest to go about his parish in flames! I hope I shall not become subject to such a thing!"

"I should prefer being subject to something else," returned Mr. McKenna; "but if it *does*

become chronic with you, Fr. John, I should advise you to carry a hose about with you, because my cloak mightn't be always at hand to extinguish you." And as he spoke the reverend gentleman sadly regarded a great hole which had been burned in his riding cloak.

The priest's native courtesy at once rose above his irritation and fright. "I'm more obliged to you, Mr. McKenna," he began, "than I could tell in a month of Sundays! Indeed ——"

"Don't mention it," interrupted the other; "What I'd like to know is, what caused the conflagration! Judging by the smell," he added, as he sniffed the air, "I should say that you have been using paraffin oil too freely as a hair-restorer; but ——"

"What!" almost shouted Fr. John.

"But," continued the unabashed Mr. McKenna, "that theory falls to the ground, as the fire began near your coat pocket. Maybe 'tis a case of spontaneous combustion, and if so, 'twould be well to go in for a diet of cooling fruits and iced waters."

"And do you think," asked Fr. John, indignantly, "that a priest of God would be wasting his own time and the money of his people, in buying oil to make his hair grow?"

"He might do worse," said Mr. McKenna, "though I don't say that he mightn't do better. But so long as it wasn't his own money he was wasting, I shouldn't bother, if I were he."

"I haven't had a drop of oil in my hair since

I was a curly headed gossoon, and my mother, God rest her soul, used to put some Bay Rum in it every Saturday night after she washed it."

"I believe you, Fr. John," remarked the minister, regarding the priest's hair, which was snow-white, and very thin. But for once, Fr. John's Irish humour failed him. With great dignity he picked up his tall hat, and placed it on his head at an angle of forty-five degrees. This gave him an insanely waggish aspect, utterly at variance with his usual venerable appearance. But unconscious of anything wrong, he walked majestically on, while Mr. McKenna collapsed in a convulsion of mirth.

When the priest returned home, he found to his dismay, that nothing remained of the kippers but one head and two tails; moreover, his pipe was charred, and almost ruined, and the smell of paraffin oil was overpowering. Then the cause of the calamity slowly dawned on him. The kippers, in keeping with everything out of Murphys' Stores, had been not entirely innocent of oil, and he remembered putting his pipe, while still hot, with perhaps, indeed, a spark in it, into his pocket: hence the fire.

For some time after this there was a coolness between the priest and the parson; but one fine morning, as Fr. John was mounting his cob, he overheard Jamesy O'Farrell and the village postman talking together. To his sorrow, he gathered from their conversation that the minister was very ill at the Rectory.

"'Tis the fever, God save us!" said Jamesy,

in terror-stricken tones, "an' av coorse, no wan dars go nigh him bud the docther an' nurse."

"And why wasn't I told?" demanded Fr. John, sharply.

"Sure, your riverance," answered Jamesy, pulling his forelock respectfully, "Misther McKenna isn't wan av your parishioners, an' there's no call at all for you to chance catchin' the faver from him, though he's a dacent poor body enough." For although the people of Ballystack liked the pleasant-spoken, though rather reserved clergyman, they simply loved their priest.

"No," said Fr. John, shortly and sharply, as he wheeled his horse round in the direction of the Rectory, "there's no call for me to go to see a sick man only the call of charity; and though Mr. McKenna is not my parishioner, he happens to be my friend!" And without another word he galloped down the boreen, and never drew rein until he dismounted at the Rectory. There he met Dr. Wilson, and the doctor looked very grave indeed.

"And how is he at all?" asked Fr. John eagerly; "and how in the world did he get the fever? God preserve us all!"

"And where would he get the fever?" said Dr. Wilson, in great surprise; "'Tis a bad attack of influenza he's had, and though the acute stage is over, he's just sinking, and I can do nothing more. If I could only rouse him, I might be able to save him; but he hasn't even a friend to visit him. You see, father," continued the good doctor,

sighing, "Mr. McKenna has only unbent to yourself, and he doesn't know or visit even his own parishioners. I doubt if they know he's ill."

"There is one friend that's going to visit him, this minute," said Fr. John quickly. "If Mr. McKenna had all the plagues of Egypt, I'd go myself to him!" and so saying, the kind-hearted sagart almost ran into the house, and went straight up to the sick room.

. . . . . .

"I do believe you've saved him, Fr. John," said the doctor next morning; and certainly, from the time of the priest's visit the patient rallied and mended rapidly. A few weeks later, the two reverend gentlemen, now greater friends than ever, could be seen arm in arm strolling along the beach and discussing natural history, about which, it is to be feared, they knew little more than one of Mr. Murphy's Antique, Antient Alligators.

So much for the Murphys' shop, and the articles of commerce contained therein, and the effect of some of these articles on the people of Ballystack. But just wait until you hear all about the Murphy family, and the grand Christmas party they gave, and the caravan holiday they took, and it's *then* you'll be wondering if there was ever such a people in the world at all. And although you may not believe it, it's the truth I'll be telling you.

CHAPTER II

THE MURPHYS' HOUSE, AND ITS INMATES

THE private residence of the Murphys rejoiced in the sonorous and soul-inspiring name of Dunscallion. Not that everyone thought the name beautiful! Shaun Murphy, who wrote poetry, and therefore sported long hair and a preposterous tie, declared the name to be an outrage on all things poetical and artistic, and a disgrace to Ballystack. Sadie, Shaun's younger sister, was responsible for it. Shaun often told her that she would also be responsible for *his* death, because the unspeakable ugliness of the name was slowly killing him. Sadie reminded him once of Shakespeare's words: "What's in a name? A rose by any other name would smell as sweet!" But her brother only remarked that as far as *he* could understand the context, Shakespeare was speaking about a rose, not a scallion, and that, if in her (Sadie's) opinion, a rose and a scallion could stand comparison in colour, beauty or odour, of course he had no more to say.

The house itself was a tall, stone building, standing in its own grounds. It had the appearance of being utterly confounded at finding itself where it was. The windows, which were numerous

and oddly shaped, gave people the idea that the house was trying to look round the corner, into the barnyard. The front drive, too, was unique. The entrance to the house stood well back from the main road; and the drive turned, with the most disconcerting abruptness, right at the gate itself. Countless accidents occurred because of this amazing turn. After the sharp turn, the drive, in some inexplicable manner, began to wind in and out like a corkscrew. At length, when visitors to the place had become perfectly convinced that they were going to the *right* and *from* the house (which could be discerned through the trees), and had commenced remonstrating with the jarvey, the drive ended quite suddenly. Whereupon the visitors would be stunned to find that the house had appeared mysteriously before them, looming up like a waggish ghost. The narrow front door with glass in it, would be staring them in the face, which door, oddly enough, people *invariably* mistook for the back door! Then would the visitor sarcastically inquire of the jarvey if it was the custom in the village to be received by the hosts at the back door. Whereupon the harrassed jarvey would declare "by everything undher *hivin*, 'twas the *front* dure, an' no mistake!" Then he would inform them, "that his father, ay, an' *grandfather* before him, had been jarvies, an' that he knew the lie av the land betther nor anywan in Ballystack! that if they wanted to know his character they had only to go to the parish priest, God bless him, an' *he'd* tell thim the sort av

boy they wor insultin', a boy who'd scorn to tell a lie ! "

At this stage of the proceeding, the unlucky visitors usually showed signs of collapsing ; seeing which, the jarvey demanded an increase of his fare, to pay for the time he had wasted in explaining matters. Having obtained an exorbitant price from the dazed passengers, he would mount his car, and rattle away down the road, vowing that " niver agin would he so *demane* himself, as to dhrive the likes av *thim* upshtarts of ignoramuses."

This distressing scene had been enacted again and again outside the Murphys' front door ; and again and again Mr. Murphy had begged his wife and sons and daughters to let him have the door altered. But the family was inexorable. Whenever the subject was mentioned Mrs. Murphy clinched the matter by saying that, in *her* opinion, if the people who came to see them, either from the country or from Dublin itself, were so hopelessly dense as to be unable to distinguish a front hall door when they saw it, it would be better to close up the place altogether, and become hermits.

Belinda and Sadie Murphy had been " finished," as their mother always grandly explained to the neighbours, at the best College on the Continent !

Denis O'Neill, who ran the *Express* (which, by the way, was not a locomotive, but a weekly paper), was endeavouring to gain the hand of Sadie Murphy. But Sadie only tossed her brown head, and smiled (not unkindly, however) at the young man's de-

votion. A real genuine lord, and no less, was the man Sadie wanted, so poor Denis's chances appeared very remote.

Belinda was already engaged to a young Dublin barrister, Donal O'Grady. He had a beautiful house beside Merrion Square, no less, with servants galore, and a carriage and pair to boot.

Shaun Murphy, as well as being a poet, was also a student. If asked what was his particular study, he would answer with a vague, dreamy smile: "I am a student of Nature."

Indeed, even Shaun's two brothers, Brian and Patsy, always declared that they loved Nature passing well. They loved to hear the cows lowing in the fields and the ducklings quacking in the ponds. Sometimes, of a fine summer morning these three high-souled young men would mount their machines and start for a long spin into the country. But unfortunately, although they always left Dunscallion *on* their bicycles, they invariably returned with the bicycles *on them*! It was simply inexplicable. Each declared himself to be a powerful and dexterous cyclist, and firmly believed he possessed a first-rate machine! Yet accidents were constantly happening. And they could never satisfactorily explain how the appalling calamities came about. Mrs. Murphy said that considering the amount of money which had been spent on their education, it was all very disheartening. Mr. Murphy said that not only was it disheartening, but also demoralising and extravagant, and that if it kept on, it would end

in bankruptcy for him and the poorhouse for them. Sadie, who like her father was refreshingly outspoken, candidly declared that the whole trouble was because neither of the three educated youths knew how to cycle, which was the truth, of course.

Then Mrs. Murphy melted into tears, and said that it was really deplorable, considering the advantage they had had of a university education, and the lessons they had taken in boxing, boating, and golfing, that they couldn't so much as ride an ordinary two-wheeled bicycle, without coming to grief. Brian replied coldly that to his knowledge he never knew any bicycle which hadn't two wheels, and therefore Mrs. Murphy's remarks were superfluous. Brian further added, that whilst admitting they had studied the three pastimes she had mentioned, he failed to perceive the point of her comments, as these games were not played by means of bicycles. Whereupon Mr. Murphy grew heated, and sarcastically demanded *what* his *omadauns* of sons *had* learnt at college? They couldn't ride, they couldn't cycle, they couldn't serve in a shop, so what in the name of patience *could* they do besides reducing a bicycle to smithereens. These very searching questions annoyed even the philosopher Shaun, and he replied curtly that they had at least learnt to keep their tempers and behave like gentlemen. This answer goaded Mr. Murphy into retorting that 'twould be a long way better for them to keep their bicycles and behave like ordinary christians, and not common clowns!

Only one more member of the Murphy household remains to be mentioned: an elderly aunt, sister to Mrs. Murphy, called Sophia. She was a most estimable person, only she had a strange hobby (mania, Belinda called it) of shutting every door and every window in the house, thereby almost causing asphyxiation to the entire Murphy family. Her motive was to keep tramps from trespassing, for she had a particular horror of these "gentlemen of the road." Her intentions were undoubtedly first rate; but the drastic manner in which she very often carried them out sometimes led to the most awkward results. Once she pounced on the Rev. Mr. McKenna, who was peering over the orchard wall, admiring some fine plums, and to his unspeakable indignation ran him into a coal-house at the end of the garden. When at last he was released from his unpleasant surroundings (looking for all the world like a Christy Minstrel), and she was asked the reason of her attack, she merely replied that she thought the clergyman was a tramp. Mr. McKenna was bitterly mortified. He rather prided himself on his well-groomed appearance, and small blame to him. Even Fr. John's gentle words were powerless for a time to soothe his ruffled spirits, although the kindly priest was the only person in the village whom the young minister liked. And a real, earnest regard and respect that was, and no mistake.

"Do I *look* like a tramp?" Mr. McKenna flashed out, when Fr. John begged him to overlook what had happened.

"Miss O'Hara didn't mean that, you know," explained the priest, beaming with kindliness; "she only thought your conduct was a little—er—peculiar."

"It was not!" retorted Mr. McKenna hotly. "I merely glanced at some plums as I was passing. There wasn't anything peculiar or suspicious in that! Sure, 'a cat may look at a king,' Father! She had better put a notice up, if she doesn't want her fruit to be even looked at! 'Onlookers prosecuted, all ministers shot!'" Then as his companion laughed outright, he added a trifle viciously: "It's herself that's peculiar and suspicious, not others!"

"Now, now, Mr. McKenna, that's not kind of you," remonstrated the priest gently. "Poor Miss O'Hara is just a wee bit fussy and over-anxious, that's all. I can't let you talk like that about anyone."

"How can you prevent it!" growled Mr. McKenna.

"Just by telling you, I don't like it!" replied the priest promptly, "I know well you'll not be going against me."

Mr. McKenna suddenly laughed. "Oh, Fr. John," he cried, somewhat ruefully, "I'm not surprised you always get your own way, for it's you have the sluthering tongue, and no mistake! I'll not say another word against Miss O'Hara!"

"That's the boy!" exclaimed the priest, delightedly, and then the two friends shook hands.

So the matter was amicably settled; but a few days afterwards, Fr. John himself suddenly disappeared, to the consternation of his parishioners, and to the unspeakable misery of the minister. The whole village was searched, and every pond and river dragged by the local police, but not a trace of their parish priest could the distracted people of Ballystack come across. At length, when Dr. Wilson was nearly exhausted, attending all the cases of collapse, and the almost frantic minister was on the point of telegraphing for the military from Dublin, the priest was found. Mike, the terrier, it was that discovered him locked up in a disused toolhouse at the bottom of the Murphy's garden. Of course it was Sophia's mistake again, and she was simply horrified when she realised what she had done.

"I'm so sorry, Father," she said tearfully, "but you looked so exactly like an intherloper, how was I to know?"

"Musha!" exclaimed the priest, good-humouredly, "who ever saw an intruder in a tall hat and a Roman collar!"

Such is a faithful description of the Murphy family, and if you doubt my veracity, just take the first train to Ballystack, and see for yourself if it's even the shadow of a lie I'm telling.

CHAPTER III

THE MURPHYS' CARAVAN HOLIDAY

ONE fine morning in early spring all the young people of Dunscallion assembled to hold a solemn conclave. The point under discussion was their usual annual holiday.

"We must have a unique holiday this year," declared Belinda emphatically. "We shall show the folks in Ballystack what we *can* do! I vote for camping out."

"Certainly not!" Sadie demurred; "what about earwigs and damp grass?"

"Why not try a river holiday?" Brian inquired.

"I have just been reading 'Three Men in a Boat,' said the pale student, Shaun; "after that, I shan't risk the river."

"I'd risk the *river* all right," Patsy murmured; "it's the *boat* that I've no yearning after."

"But one couldn't go on a river *without* a boat!" reasoned Brian.

"No, but one could go *in* a river! One could swim."

Brian gave an unpleasant laugh. "One could!" he remarked, shortly, "but *you* could not!"

"I shouldn't fancy swimming in a river for a fortnight," Sadie observed, in thoughtful tones;

" it would be a trifle monotonous. Besides, it would appear singular."

" Not only would it *appear* singular," said Brian severely, " but it would *be* singular."

" If we go on the river, we'll stick to the boat," Belinda decided. " That is, if we can," she added, as an afterthought.

" An aeroplane might come in handy," remarked Patsy.

" I'm to be married in the autumn," his sister reminded him; " I wish to return from this holiday."

" Perhaps Donal would be just as glad if you didn't," chuckled Patsy.

Before Belinda could reply, the pale student cried out suddenly, " I have it ! " Everybody started wildly and asked, " What ? "

" An idea ! We'll go caravanning ! "

Immediately they threw themselves upon his neck, and fervently embraced him.

" The idea is not unique," observed Shaun, " however, we'll adopt it."

" We shall want plenty of grub," remarked Belinda, who was fond of what she called " snacks." These same " snacks " were sufficient to feed a hungry ploughboy.

The word " grub," had slipped out unawares; for sometimes, if Miss Murphy were very excited, the " finish " of her college education rolled away, like water off a duck's back.

" And butterscotch and bootlaces," supplemented Patsy.

"What connection have butterscotch and bootlaces?" demanded Brian.

"None in the world, I only threw out the suggestion."

"If you don't talk sense," observed Brian, coldly, "I'll suggest that you be thrown out."

"And of course we shall have to bring tacks, and plenty of twine," said Shaun.

"For what?" they all asked.

"For everything," was the astounding reply.

"But not for *food*, surely?" exclaimed Belinda, aghast at the mere idea. "We're not elephants, nor ostriches."

"Nor yet tinkers, nor hangmen," remonstrated Brian.

But the student was firm. "Tacks," he decreed, "were extremely useful; and as for *twine*, why! it was simply invaluable!

"We had better make a list of what we want," said Belinda, and she fetched two quires of foolscap and a pint of ink, and started to write. After three hours' hard work, they found that what they wanted would cost about fifty pounds, and amounted to one hundred and twenty-four different articles.

"That won't do!" Belinda decided.

At this moment Mrs. Murphy sailed into the room. Mrs. Murphy never "walked"; she either sailed or floated gracefully along in a cloud of rustling drapery. By her side trotted the elderly aunt.

"Children," asked Mrs. Murphy, as she looked at the list, "are you going out to Australia?"

"Or out of your minds?" supplemented the elderly aunt.

"No; we are simply going for a holiday in a caravan."

"In a *what*?" demanded Mrs. Murphy.

"In a caravan," repeated Belinda. "It's quite the thing for ——"

"For tinkers, or pedlars, or knife-sharpeners, or —or thieves," interrupted Miss Sophia, with strong indignation, "but not for us!"

"Sophia!" said Mrs. Murphy, "calm yourself!"

"Good heavens, Selena! Do you consider me a—a juggler, or a *fool*?"

"We'll not discuss that point," remarked Brian, calmly; "For the present, Belinda, we had better reduce that list."

So they crossed off the one hundred articles, leaving only the twenty-four.

"Now, I think we're about all right," observed Belinda, with great satisfaction.

"You've forgotten the caravan and the horse," murmured Shaun, gently.

Once again they fell on Shaun, and embraced him. Mrs. Murphy and the elderly aunt were so affected that they immediately consented to the trip.

Two months later they started, Belinda's cat making one of the party. The horse, whose name was Tiny, was the size of a small elephant. It had a crooked eye, and its ears were lop-sided. None of the party could drive, although Mr. Murphy himself was as fine a whip as any in the country-

side. Sadie said that one of the many pleasures of the caravan holiday would be learning how to drive.

They started off from Dunscallion in high good humour, Mr. Murphy gaily waving farewell from the steps, while the grey old house, flecked with sunshine and shadow, leered impishly on them as they jogged down the corkscrew drive.

All went well, until they came to a slight incline, then to their dismay, the horse suddenly lay down. It didn't exactly fall ; it just sat down, almost on its hind legs, and refused to get up. The expression on its elephantine countenance was one of rare enjoyment.

Brian bitterly reproached Shaun for having hired a circus horse. He wanted to know why Shaun had not engaged the clowns and the harlequin as well, so that they could have made a regular penny show of it, break-down, dances and all.

Shaun retorted that to his mind there was a sufficiency of clowns in the party already. Sadie declared that *one* breakdown was about as much as she fancied ; while Patsy observed plaintively that the only thing which troubled *him* was the harrowing fear of a break-up !

Mrs. Murphy gave one agonised glance up the road, and down the road, and then above into the summer sky, fearing that by some unlucky chance, some of the Ballystack inhabitants were witnesses of their discomfiture.

Belinda, always practical, suggested that they should have some " grub," whilst the horse rested

and pondered. They accordingly laid a cloth on the grass; set out the new tin dinner service which they had borrowed from the Stores, and sat down.

Before they had well begun, however, a crashing peal of thunder reverberated through the heavens. The cat uttered a hideous yell, and sprang right into the middle of a dish of bacon. There was a wild rush into the caravan, the party leaving the dinner to the mercy of the elements.

"It is only a summer shower," began Belinda, hopefully, and ——" but she got no further. At that moment the caravan began to go round and round like a tee-to-tum.

"I hope the horse hasn't been struck by lightning," said Shaun, anxiously.

"It is more likely that it is practising some new circus trick," muttered Brian, directing a look of exceeding bitterness towards his brother.

"I believe," Belinda gasped, as the rocking of the caravan became perfectly appalling, "that the animal is drunk!"

"I shall be sick, I know I shall!" moaned Mrs. Murphy. "Our insides will be reduced to chaos!"

"I don't mind how chaotic our insides become," lamented the elderly aunt, "so long as our outsides are not reduced to atoms!"

Just then Tiny began tearing along the road like an express train. Sophia uttered a piercing shriek, and instantly fainted.

"The grub!" gasped Belinda, still loyal to her inside.

"We'll be destroyed!" wailed Mrs. Murphy.

"Let's stop the horse!" suggested Shaun, brightly.

The idea was sound, but impractical, none of the party being acrobats. At length Tiny came to a hill, and not liking it, promptly sat down again. The shock was so great that the elderly aunt was knocked off her chair, but she revived at once.

Then they were obliged to walk back four miles for the dinner, as Tiny refused to move. They found the beautifully cooked bacon and cabbage and potatoes a revolting wreck.

"In the future," decided Belinda, "we shall have our meals in the caravan. It will be safer."

But that did not answer either, for Tiny had a most unpleasant habit of forcing his large head through the window, quite suddenly, whenever they were at meals. Whereupon the elderly aunt would begin to cry, because she said it was both preposterous and nerve-racking. They barricaded the windows, therefore, and took their meals in dim twilight.

As for the nights, they were simply weird! The "darling" cat suffered from the delusion that he was a nightingale, and serenaded unceasingly as long as darkness reigned.

Another drawback was that they usually ran short of food when miles away from a village or town. This was owing, partly to the cat, which was a deliberate thief, and partly to the horse, which used to nibble everything it came across.

Tiny's slowness of pace, too, was very annoying.

An ordinary, sensible snail might have easily bettered it. It was about four miles an hour, and English miles at that. And whenever this fiery steed came to an incline it promptly sat down at the foot, and gravely considered the situation; and whenever it came to a decline, it slithered down to the base, with tremendous velocity, neighing hilariously. And to add to the Murphys' many misfortunes, they soon discovered that Tiny had an iron will. Often they were obliged to pay heavy fines for trespassing, all through the misguided beast's obstinacy.

But at last even the patience of Shaun, poet, student, philosopher as he was, gave out.

It was evening, and the noble hills, and deep, peaceful valleys were burnished with the golden glory of the setting sun. Away in the meadows a corncrake was uttering its harsh, familiar cry; and from the distant ocean came the plaintive call of a seagull.

Shaun spoke with awful calmness, and smiled a ghastly smile. "I'm going to beat Tiny," he said; "I'll *make* him go faster. As he is warranted not to run away, nothing can happen."

But the student was wrong; something *did* happen! The moment Tiny felt the whip, he began to go round and round; then, by way of a change, he went sideways; and at length began to back steadily.

"We're going into a river!" Belinda cried feverishly; "we'll all be drowned!"

"Ay," muttered Patsy, with a diabolical chuckle,

" we've come to the river in the long run, and *without a boat!* "

" Try to get out! " advised Brian, and they all made a frantic rush to the door, thereby precluding all chance of escape.

" Help! " screamed Mrs. Murphy.

" Help! help! " shrieked the elderly aunt.

But there was no help. The horse, cat, caravan and all hands went into the river.

Some tourists who fortunately happened to motor up, immediately stopped their car, and rescued the unhappy people. Lastly they managed to save the criminal horse, which was sinking for the third time. The cat, faithful to the last, was clinging to Tiny's colossal head, serenading dismally.

" Where are you going now? " the rescuers demanded.

" Home! " replied Mrs. Murphy, faintly.

" Home! " firmly repeated the elderly aunt.

" Yes, certainly, we had better go home," agreed all the rest.

" But where do you live? " inquired the old gentleman who owned the motor. " If you don't get home pretty quick, it's dead you'll all be by this time to-morrow. Ay, as dead as bacon," he added, glancing from one dripping figure to another.

Mrs. Murphy shuddered, and closed her eyes; while Belinda, with a cry of horror, caught her cat and hugged it, gasping out: " Oh, Donal! Donal! " The strangers, therefore, concluded that

the cat's name was Donal, and that Belinda's only regret in dying was her love for the villainous-looking animal.

"Father," remonstrated the younger tourist, who had merry grey eyes, and a sunny smile, "you alarm these good people unnecessarily. If you will tell us your address," he added, turning courteously to Mrs. Murphy, "we will make room for you ladies, at least, in our car, and motor you home as quickly as possible."

"You are very kind," Mrs. Murphy murmured, "we shall be immensely obliged to you if you do."

The young man went over to his chauffeur, who was gazing vacantly into space, and said briskly: "Stir yourself, Miles! Get down out of that, and help these ladies up. We'll manage all somehow."

"Be the powers, Master Barney," replied Miles, "I don't see how ye'll manage it at all, at all! Your honour disremimbers that 'tis only a mothor car ye have, an' not the rale Irish jauntin' car av the ould times! 'Tis thim ud hould Fionn McCoole himself an' iviry other giant from the four provinces of Ireland, wid the greatest comfort, an' room to spare afther that!" And Miles heaved a regretful sigh for the fast-waning glory of the outside car; the fiery little cob, and the joy of a jarvey's life.

"Perhaps," murmured Mrs. Murphy, "glancing at the gentleman in the car, "if your son, Mr.—er —Mr.——"

" O'Hagan is my name; ma'am, Dan O'Hagan of Castlebawn, Dundrum, Co. Dublin."

" I was about to say, Mr. O'Hagan, that if your son could drive our horse —— "

" Your *what*, ma'am ? " interrupted Mr. O'Hagan.

" Our horse," faltered Mrs. Murphy, with a wavering glance at Tiny.

Mr. O'Hagan fixed a stony stare on the quadruped in question. That intelligent animal seemed to shrivel under the horror of it, and with a short groan, sat down heavily, and remained there as if petrified.

" My son, ma'am," said Mr. O'Hagan, " has had a first rate training in driving. He's the finest whip on the Baldoyle roads, and there isn't a jockey at Fairyhouse who could beat him. Racer, trotter, hunter ; they're all one to Barney. From pig to polo pony, he can manage them all ! "

" Thrue for ye ! " ejaculated Miles, with an adoring glance at his embarrassed young master.

" But, unfortunately," continued Mr. O'Hagan, with grim humour, " he wasn't taught to drive elephants nor dragons, as he has no intention of becoming a second Mungo Park. Barney," he added, sarcastically, " could you drive that—that *gargoyle* ? "

But Barney, his handsome face flushing deeply, turned quickly to the discomfited Mrs. Murphy. " Do let me help you into the car," he said, gently ; " you'll all be famished. I'll send the motor back for your sons."

In the twinkling of an eye, all the ladies were

comfortably settled, and the car sprang forward. "Miles will be back for you in no time," called out Barney, cheerfully, to the three disconsolate young men who were gazing into the river.

"Where are we goin' to, at all, Master Barney?" asked Miles as the motor raced along the white road.

Mrs. Murphy hastily gave their address, and told her name. She had recovered her usual genteel dignity in spite of a perfectly flat bonnet and a dirty streak of mud on her cheek. Barney plunged into a conversation with Sadie, who, as he soon discovered, was a pianist, and loved music.

"How jolly!" he exclaimed boyishly, "I play the violin! Perhaps we shall have duets sometimes."

"I am sure we would all be delighted to know you and your father," returned Sadie frankly; "You've been so kind. But are you staying here at Ballystack?"

"We shall be," he assured her promptly, "you see, we've been motoring about, looking for some out-of-the-way village, to spend our holidays in, and I'm sure Ballystack will suit all right," and leaning over the back of his seat, he explained matters to his father.

Mr. O'Hagan was quite agreeable. So long as Barney (who was the jewel of his father's heart) was pleased, he was perfectly content. As for Mrs. Murphy, she simply beamed her satisfaction. Here at last, she told herself rapturously, was the chance to get a good match for Sadie. Although the O'Hagans were not belted earls, or titled lords,

they were certainly gentlemen and, apparently, very rich. So Mrs. Murphy's reflections were exceedingly pleasant, and she thoroughly enjoyed the journey home.

Arrived at Dunscallion, Mr. O'Hagan and Barney were made welcome with true Irish hospitality, and Miles, having been refreshed by a plate of steaming ham and eggs, was despatched to complete the rescue of the three high-souled young men.

"And how did you get the horse and caravan back, Miles?" asked Barney.

"I didn't get thim back, yer honour."

"And why in the world didn't you?"

"Well, 'twas like this," Miles explained, "wan ind av the caravan was in the wather, an' the other ind av it in the mud, an' be the powers, 'twould have taken a steam engine to move it!"

"Well, then, why didn't you bring the horse?"

Miles grinned suddenly. "*The horse*, is it!" he exclaimed, "Man, jewel, the divil himself couldn't move the baste!"

"You don't mean to say that it's still sitting in the road?" asked Barney, quite confounded at the idea.

"Right enough!" nodded Miles, "'tis sittin' it is, for all the world like a Chinese image, an' sorra the bit would it stir! Even though we blew the motor horn into its two ears, an' danced a four hand reel in front av it!"

"Belinda," said Brian, the next day, "you were right. It was a unique holiday."

They all agreed; but the cat wept.

CHAPTER IV

SOME MOTOR ACCIDENTS

BARNEY O'HAGAN had purchased a new motor car, although he possessed two already. It will be remembered that Barney and his father had determined to spend their holidays in Ballystack; but they had been so charmed by the picturesque beauty of the little village and its environs, that they had bought a country house right away, and had arranged with the Murphys to spend the Christmas holidays also in Ballystack. Their house was a quaint, old building, which Barney called "Lissaun," with a good deal of land attached; but it was in a rather dilapidated condition. However, the O'Hagans were wealthy, so they had the land tilled, and the wild garden put in order, and Barney bought cattle, and learnt farming, but spent nearly all he earned, which was considerable, on motor cars.

Father and son found the whole place delightful; the people friendly and sincere, and the family at Dunscallion charming and well bred. As for the parish priest, he was at once prime favourite, as was the case everywhere he went, indeed. Barney and Sadie Murphy practised duets assiduously, and all the young folk picnicked and boated and

played games together, as happy as children. Old Mr. O'Hagan became a great friend of Mr. Murphy, riding and driving, and discussing horses enthusiastically.

But there was one individual in Ballystack with whom Barney was not on good terms. This was Major Hamilton, a retired English officer, who was an exceedingly choleric gentleman. He lived alone in a beautiful old house called "Coolcrannach," or "the sylvan hollow." The house nestled among trees, which were of noble structure. Massive chestnuts, sweeping ashes, graceful and delicate; towering oaks, and splendid leafy beeches. Here and there the lighter golden green of the limes, and the rich, glowing purple of the copper beeches riveted the eye with the exquisite contrast of their wondrous tints.

Major Hamilton was profoundly obstinate, and he firmly believed that his twenty horse-power motor was the best ever put on the market. Barney O'Hagan, more for sheer mischief than for any other reason, firmly maintained that his new patent car was far and away the finest ever invented! Sadie proposed that the disputants should have a motor race, to prove which car was the better. This was agreed upon; but unfortunately, both motors sank in a treacherous bog, and it took the united aid of the local police, the fishing crew, the village fire brigade, and the champion hurling team to extricate them.

When Major Hamilton saw the state of his beautiful car his language became so terrible that

the villagers dispersed in dismay; and when the luckless Barney arrived home, his chauffeur at once gave notice, saying that "as well as he could remimber, he had been engaged to dhrive a mothor car, bud that he wasn't goin' to make a black slave av himself for man nor mothor!" Barney told Miles not to behave like a gom; whereat the chauffeur so far forgot himself as to give his young master what he called "a piece av his mind." This proved such disagreeable hearing that Barney discharged Miles on the spot. Then he walked off, his head in the air, but he was collared by his father, and hauled into the study. Here Mr. O'Hagan rated him soundly for an hour and three quarters, finishing by warning him that if he played any such monkey tricks again, he would be horse-whipped, and also disinherited. When Barney tried to point out that it was his own car, bought with his own money (for the young man had independent means), his father merely remarked that he had always been a spendthrift, and would end in the bankruptcy court. As Barney was a teetotaller and never betted, and very seldom even smoked, this statement rather surprised him.

"And do you expect any chauffeur to clean a car that's been plunged into a morass?" Mr. O'Hagan asked at length.

"The car *wasn't* plunged in a morass," contradicted Barney, who was always ready for an argument, "it sunk in a bog, and I *did* expect the chauffeur to clean it. But he refused."

"I knew he'd refuse!" cried Mr. O'Hagan, triumphantly.

"And I discharged him," continued Barney, calmly.

"What!" shouted his father; "you discharged *Miles*! Has he gone?"

"No, he's not gone," replied Barney, who was looking out of the window, "he's out there, looking at the car."

"You said you had discharged him!"

"So I did, but apparently he won't be discharged."

"Go right down and apologise, and beg him to remain!" commanded Mr. O'Hagan.

"All right," agreed Barney cheerfully. But when he reached the door he called back, "I'm going to ask him why he hasn't gone."

So saying he leisurely descended the stairs, and went out to the discharged chauffeur.

"I say, Miles," said he, "why aren't you gone?"

Miles flushed. "I'm not goin', your honour," he answered doggedly.

"Oh, yes, you are," Barney assured him coolly, "I gave you your discharge, you know."

Miles dropped the polishing cloth, he was holding and stared at the young man before him. It was the first time he had ever known Barney to be angry with him.

"Surely, Master Barney," he exclaimed, incredulously, "ye'll not be tellin' me to go afther all the years I've been with ye! An'—an'—'twas

meself that always took your honour's part whin there was ruckshuns at home, an' whin everywan, barrin' your father, God bless him, was against your honour ! "

A very tender expression stole into Barney's grey eyes, but the clear-cut, grave lips were as hard as ever.

" Master Barney," said Miles at last, in a kind of desperation, as the young man still kept silence : " I'm—I'm sorry for what I'm afther sayin' to ye ! And sure yourself an' your car ud thry the patience of Job, so yees would ! "

Barney smiled, all his vexation slipping away. " My father sent me down to apologise to you," he told Miles, " and he bade me ask you to remain. I'm very glad you are staying with us, however," he added, laying a caressing hand on his chauffeur's arm ; " I'd be lost without you. And I don't know— " here he smiled whimsically—" who would be my support whenever my father pounced on me if you were gone."

Miles gave a sympathetic grin. " Did you tell him what I up an' said to you ? " he asked.

" I did not. What do you take me for ? "

" For a rale gintleman ! " exclaimed Miles, catching the young man's hand in his own.

Just then Mr. O'Hagan put his head out through the study window, and his son called up to him : " It's all right ! I didn't apologise to Miles, but he did to me instead, and he's going away." So saying, Barney bolted, leaving his father completely mystified.

As for Major Hamilton, after the unlucky motor accident, he took a violent prejudice against all motors, and banished them from his garage. He also put up the following notice on a road which ran through his demesne: "All traffic strictly prohibited; trespassers will be prosecuted." The inhabitants of Ballystack would have been greatly incensed against the arbitrary Major only for an incident of the past.

Five years before, bad times had come to the prosperous little village. All the landlords had raised the already exorbitant rents of the tiny cabins, and the unfortunate people who could not pay were flung on the roadside, destitute; for the agents were merciless. Then came a bad potato crop, blighted when only half grown. The harvest, also, owing to the wet season, failed. Famine and fever, those two awful scourges, followed in quick succession. Mr. Murphy almost beggared himself, giving food and money to the starving poor; his wife and daughters, and even Miss Sophia, heroically attended the sick and dying; whilst his sons, aided by the indefatigable Doctor Wilson, toiled unceasingly, erecting shelters for those who were homeless. Fr. John grew haggard with pity, and feeble from sheer want, for the devoted pastor literally starved himself for the sake of his dear, stricken flock. The minister, too, always loyal, worked side by side with the priest, striving to stem the awful tide of want and sickness. But all efforts seemed unavailing; the evictions continued; the famine grew worse, and some of the

men, maddened by hunger and injustice, and by watching the sufferings of those they loved, broke the law recklessly by trespassing on Major Hamilton's land to get rabbits and other game for food. They were imprisoned by the Major's express orders ; or so his agent said.

And still the famine crept steadily, but relentlessly, onward, like some horrible beast of prey. Famished women and children crouched before the empty hearths ; and gaunt, wild-eyed men stalked through the village, or stood watching with agonised faces their ruined homes.

At length the dread news came that the evictions on Major Hamilton's estate were to start at once. When Fr. O'Brien heard that, he snatched up his hat, and stumbled out into the darkness, and down the hill towards Coolcrannach. It was a wild November evening, and the wind and rain together almost carried the old priest off his feet. But he struggled bravely on, and after an hour's hard battle with the elements, he saw the bright lights of the big house twinkling through the swaying trees. As he neared the gate, he met Mr. McKenna, with a basket on his arm. " In the name of patience, Father," exclaimed the minister, " what brings you out on such a night ? It will be the death of you ! "

" I'm going in to see Major Hamilton," panted the priest, " these evictions *must* be stopped ! "

" It's useless trying to stop them, Fr. O'Brien ! The agent told me that Major Hamilton is the hardest of all."

"God help us!" exclaimed Fr. John, "my poor, poor people!" Then he broke down completely, and covering his face with his shaking hands, sobbed helplessly. The minister's heart was contracted with pity; but he felt that such grief was too sacred for comment. He stood silent, while the wind raved through the trees, and the great branches creaked and groaned, flinging themselves to and fro, like restless, tortured souls, sobbing out their hopeless pain. And through the driving rain the twinkling lights shone eerily, as if they were mocking will-o'-the-wisps, luring travellers onwards. At length the priest raised his bent head, and threw back his shoulders: "Uch! what an unbelieving old man I am," he exclaimed; "I was almost forgetting that Almighty God is still with us!" A lump rose to the minister's throat, but he made no answer. "Will you come in with me to see the Major?" asked Fr. O'Brien.

"I would, willingly, only I—I—" here the minister grew embarrassed, and stumbled over his words—"am going on a little errand,"

The priest's eyes rested questioningly on the covered basket.

"It's only a taste of chicken," stammered Mr. McKenna, flushing scarlet; "I killed the few I had. This will keep the life in Nan Hogan, poor old soul, for the broth is very good."

A very tender glow shone in Fr. John's eyes. How he loved this Good Samaritan, who was neighbour to all. "Whatever you do to the least of these, My brethren, you do it unto Me," quoted

the priest, softly. Then without another word, he went on his way towards the gleaming lights.

Buffeted by the boisterous wind, and stung by the pitiless, blinding rain, the old priest had scarcely strength to lift the heavy knocker with his numbed fingers. The door was opened at once by a tall, solemn, English butler.

" I want to see Major Hamilton," said Fr. John.

The butler looked embarrassed. " I got orders to allow no one in, sir," said he.

" I *must* see him ! " exclaimed the priest, vehemently, " it's a most serious matter."

" I really cannot let you see him, sir," returned the butler, looking genuinely distressed; " it would mean losing my place, and I have a wife and three children depending on me. I'm very sorry, sir," he added, seeing the misery in Fr. John's face, " but it's not my fault, indeed ! "

" My son," said the priest gently, " I'm here on behalf of other wives and children; poor, helpless mothers and starving little children, crying for bread. For God's sake, let me see your master."

The man paused, irresolute; then, without a word, stepped aside and allowed the priest to enter. " Major Hamilton is in his study," said the butler, " it's the first door on your right, up that flight of stairs."

Fr. John put his hand on the man's shoulder. " The God of the poor won't let you suffer for this," he said quietly; and then turned and, slowly climbing the stairs, knocked at the door. A gruff

voice bade him enter, and he went in, closing the door behind him.

It was a magnificent room, furnished luxuriously, the walls lined with massive bookcases of old oak. Signs of immense wealth and perfect taste were evident everywhere. Thick carpets, silken hangings, heavy antique furniture, and rare bric-a-brac. A glorious fire of fragrant pine logs roared up the wide chimney, and three splendid dogs, a great Dane, and two setters, were stretched out on the furry rug, basking in the heat.

The master of all this opulence was reclining in a capacious armchair, reading "Punch." He was a tall, bronzed man, past middle age, but erect and alert still; in fact, a typical English soldier.

The priest stood still, panting a little, one shaking hand pressed to his forehead. After the boisterous play of the elements the light and warmth were almost overpowering. And the wide contrast between all this luxury and the grim, ghastly poverty and sickness in the village beyond, went to his heart like a knife. He looked at the dogs, lying in the glowing heat; and then he thought of the cold empty hearths, and desolate human beings, and he shivered, as with an ague. But at last he managed to speak: "I've come," he began, and then stopped, for the room started to swim before his eyes.

"I see you've come," snapped Major Hamilton, "but you weren't invited, and I don't want you."

"Famine and death are outside your gate," said the priest, in hollow tones.

"I'm glad they're not *inside* my gate," rapped out the Major.

The priest steadied himself by catching hold of the back of a chair, for he felt the world was slipping away from him. "Can't you pity others, Major Hamilton?" he faltered.

"*I* did not put the blight on the potatoes," was the irritating reply, "nor ruin the harvest! I don't think the Irish farmers know how to manage the crops, nor till the land properly. You are always having potato blights in Ireland, Fr. O'Brien; it's both absurd and unbusinesslike."

"Have you no heart?" groaned the priest.

"Of course I have a heart! How could I be alive otherwise? Really you ought to have something better to do than coming asking people ridiculous, not to say personal, questions."

"Listen to me!" implored the priest, but Major Hamilton cut him short.

"Really, Fr. O'Brien," he said curtly, "I wish you'd go away, and let me read my paper in peace. I shall certainly dismiss that blockhead, James, for having disobeyed my orders. With regard to your visit, I am not interested in the construction of riddles, neither am I skilled in the art of divining them. In fact, I consider the pursuit childish. But if ever my soul should yearn after conundrums (which is extremely unlikely) I shall assuredly send for you to propound some. As a matter of fact, however, I think your riddles are remarkably poor, a child might easily do better."

The mocking words stung like the lash of a

whip, but there was no anger in the priest's heart, for he was thinking only of his people. He made a desperate effort to speak but failed, and the Major looked up quickly. He saw the old priest standing patiently near the door, his white hair dishevelled; his face gaunt with the awful ravages of famine, and a world of agonised appeal in his kind, tired eyes. With a muttered exclamation the soldier sprang to his feet, and was only in time to catch the frail form as the priest sank into a swoon.

James hastily arrived on the scene in answer to the violent ringing of the bell. To his amazement, he found his master bending over Fr. John, whom he had laid on a sofa, tending him with a woman's solicitude, and the deftness of the trained soldier.

When Fr. O'Brien recovered consciousness, the Major was still beside him, and James stood near, holding a glass of steaming whiskey. Major Hamilton held the priest's thin hand in his own, with a strong, reassuring clasp, whilst with the other, he softly brushed aside the scattered hair with lithe, brown fingers.

As soon as Fr. John could get up, his host insisted on his partaking of a nourishing supper, consisting of a beautifully prepared chicken, some delicate autumn spinach, with white sauce, a delicious curry (which the Major himself prepared from an Indian recipe), and a cup of fragrant coffee, as the priest refused to take wine. Only then would Major Hamilton listen to what his

visitor had come to say; and at ten o'clock the priest returned home in the Major's own motor.

What passed between the two, no one ever knew; but the next day the agent was dismissed, James received an increase in his wages, Fr. O'Brien and the minister a large sum of money for the starving poor, and the unfortunate men who had been imprisoned were released on the Major's bail. From that time, too, he managed his property himself, with Brian Murphy as helper, and a very fair, considerate landlord he was, if a trifle hasty. Such was the reason why the people of Ballystack kept a warm corner in their grateful hearts for the irascible Major, for the remembrance of that black year and his generosity would last for ever.

But after his motor stuck in the bog, Major Hamilton became a greater recluse than ever, seeing no one, or speaking to no one, only on business. Every three months, however, he sent Fr. O'Brien a generous donation for the poor, and if they happened to meet, the soldier used to salute the priest with military precision. But his temper became so erratic that even the faithful butler could scarcely keep his situation.

Barney O'Hagan was honestly sorry about the dispute; but, as he said, and reasonably enough, too, he didn't make the bog, nor push the cars into it. He tried again and again to make friends, but all his advances were repulsed. And he was the first who had ever refused Barney's cheery smile and outstretched hand. Even Mr. O'Hagan,

who was an exceedingly peppery old gentleman, and who always treated Barney like a very young, extremely naughty, little boy, still almost adored his handsome chivalrous son. And Barney knew it, and got his own way in everything he put his mind to.

The people of Ballystack always asserted that there were three evils which should be banished from this village, namely, the Antique Alligators, the Irish terrier Mike, and Nora O'Mahony's cousin Rory. They affirmed, and rightly too, that Rory was "a young divil, out an' out, an' that he would end his days in Mountjoy prison!" As for Nora herself, it was unanimously agreed that she was "the purtiest colleen that ever danced a reel, or drove a low-backed car to the fair." Dark-haired and dark-eyed was Nora, slender and graceful as a young larch, with a winsome face, and laughing lips, and an innocent, happy heart. And all the boys were in despair because she wouldn't look at one of them, and all the girls were wishing to be like her.

A few weeks after the disaster of the motor cars, Rory came home from Dublin for his summer holidays. Rory was only fourteen, and he had the face of an angel; yet he was in mischief from morning until night, and was always leading his cousin Nora into the wildest escapades, although she was four years his senior.

One fine day Nora went up to Dunscallion with some fresh eggs and butter. Rory accompanied her, and seeing Barney's motor car outside the

gate, immediately yearned to drive it. So when Nora came down the steps she found her cousin sitting in the car, calmly examining it.

"I say, Nora," said he, "do you think we could make this thing go?"

"To be sure we could if we tried," replied Nora, not understanding his drift. She stepped into the car beside him, and pointed out one particular piece of machinery. "Ye just turn this thing round," she explained, "and then off with it."

"Here goes, then," said the mischievous Rory; and before Nora could stop him, he gave a quick turn to the handle and the great car sprang forward with a lurch.

"Rory!" screamed his cousin, aghast, "ye villain, ye! It's kilt we'll be! An' what will Mr. O'Hagan say to us at all, at all!"

"It won't be worth his while saying anything to us if we're dead," remarked Rory cheerfully; "We'll just let the foolish thing run down, and then we'll get out."

"It's ourselves that 'ill be run down, an' there'll be nothin' left of us to get out," wailed Nora.

These gruesome predictions were almost coming true. The car simply *raced* along the white road, gathering speed every second. At last Rory gave the steering wheel a sudden wrench to the right, and the motor, like a well-trained horse, answering to the rein, swerved aside. Then with a great buzz of racked machinery it crashed into a gate they were passing, and there stuck fast, panting and sobbing.

The two delinquents crept cautiously out of the wreck, and made their way home, through the fields, leaving the car to its fate.

Of course, they didn't know that it was Major Hamilton's gate they had ruined; but the next morning the luckless Barney knew. He received a perfectly frantic letter from that injured gentleman, informing him that he was a ne'er-do-weel, a breaker of the peace, a pest to the village, a menace to decent society, and a thorough scamp. The letter also informed him that he would be summoned at once for the dastardly outrage.

Barney felt that the letter was a bit strong, especially as he had not hand, act or part in "the dastardly outrage." He didn't care a jot about the summons, but he did care about the damage which had been done to his beautiful car, and he was sorry, too, about the Major's gate. Above all, he knew that his father would be exceedingly annoyed; so he put his pride in his pocket, and wrote to Major Hamilton, explaining that he was blameless, and begging the Major to overlook the matter, and he would get the gate repaired. But Major Hamilton was obdurate. He curtly answered that the owner of the car would have to pay the penalty due to trespass; and poor Barney was heavily fined.

When Nora heard this, she fiercely dragged her unwilling cousin up to Lissaun, and confessed her fault; and she would have also gone to Major Hamilton only Barney was too generous to allow her. But for all that, he was furiously angry with

them both, and only Nora's tears and entreaties prevented him from giving Rory a severe thrashing.

But after that first momentous meeting with Nora, Barney changed. He began to attend late Mass on Sundays, as Nora did, and he grew suddenly solicitous over his housekeeper and insisted that she should have help with the dairy work, and mentioned casually that Nora O'Mahony was a first-rate hand with butter and cheese. And many more pretexts did this wily young man find so that he might become better acquainted with Nora.

As for the interest he took in cattle, it amounted almost to a mania! So much so, that his father was tormented with the horrible misgiving that his cultured, rather fastidious son was thinking of becoming a butcher!

And Nora herself grew more lovely every day, and her smile more winsome, and her innocent heart more happy.

So the weeks passed, and the beauties of summer waned to the mellow glories of autumn. Yet Barney still lingered in the little Irish village, apparently unaware that such a prosaic place as Dublin ever existed. And, indeed, for him there was nothing real in the world only his love for Nora, and his intense gratitude to God for allowing them to meet. For this exquisite, tender, reverent love was drawing Barney very near to heaven and to God.

CHAPTER V

"THE PLAY'S THE THING"

"WHAT I want," said Shaun Murphy, looking solemnly at his brother Patsy, "is local colour."

It was a mellow autumn evening, and the studious Shaun was seated by an open window trying to concentrate his worn-out faculties on the writing of a tragic play. For quite suddenly Shaun had awoke to the fact that as well as being a poet, he was also a playwright. Unfortunately, however, none of the managers to whom he submitted his work, had awoke to the same fact. It was very depressing; but Shaun, with true Celtic optimism, refused to entertain even the *idea* of defeat, and kept working hopefully, consoling himself with the adage: "Fair and easy goes far in the day."

Patsy gravely regarded his brother's pale face, dark hair, and generally washed-out appearance. "You surely do want some local colour," he agreed cordially, "and the sooner the better. Run down to the beach, and play a game of 'Hunt the slipper' with the jelly-fish and the winkles. Then bask in the sun for a bit, and you'll get plenty of local colour in no time."

"Oh, you gom!" returned Shaun, "I don't

mean *that* sort of local colour! I mean surroundings, and all that."

"Nothing easier," said his brother airily: "Sprint out to the sands, before the sun is quite up, and dab some ultra-marine and eau-de-nil paints, on a piece of sacking, I should say, of course, canvas, and the thing is done."

"Idiot!" ejaculated Shaun in disgust.

"Explain yourself!"

"The principal character in my new play," the dramatist proceeded to explain, "is a dairymaid, and I want her to be a real, true life-study, and you've got to do the studying."

"My dear fellow," remonstrated Patsy, "don't be preposterous! Do you imagine that I'm going to spend my whole life studying dairymaids just for the sake of your new play? It's simply out of the question! Man alive, it's an old play it would be by the time I'd have finished my life-study, I'll go bail. And what would Kate be saying to me if I were to devote my young life to the studying of dairymaids instead of devoting it to herself? Shaun, a bhuachaill, have some sense."

"You know perfectly well," returned the student, "that I meant a study from life, not a life-study."

"Why on earth don't you say what you mean, then, and not be putting the car before the horse like that!"

By a superhuman effort Shaun suppressed an inclination to kick his brother, as he wanted his help.

"I think," he remarked in a casual manner,

looking out at the glowing autumn sunset as he spoke, "that a little holiday would be delightful just now. Down towards Munster; Kerry, for example."

It sounded all right, of course, but Patsy saw through the nefarious designs.

"Shaun," he said, with portentious gravity, "it won't do!"

"What won't do?"

"This idea of sacrificing me yet again on the altar of fraternal love. I have come to grief pretty often, helping you, as you may remember. Once I was nearly being arrested for impersonating a burglar; and another time I was almost carried away in the prime of my young manhood, by a great wave, out there in the bay, at Carrigbawn, whilst pretending I was bereft of sense."

"I don't know if there was much pretence about that," remarked Shaun.

"When I think," continued his brother, "of Katie keening dismally over my dead corpse, I could weep."

"It's you that's got the great opinion of yourself, anyhow!" exclaimed Shaun.

"I'm bound to, as nobody else has."

"Are you going to help me?" asked Shaun.

"I have already immolated myself on that gouty, or rather gory shrine —"

"How are you here, then?" interrupted Shaun.

Patsy was struck with the logic of this remark, and his brilliant flow of rhetoric was nipped in the bud. He shifted his ground, therefore.

"Do you want me to disguise myself as a Hottentot savage, or a jibbering Indian?" he inquired, "and court some beauteous damsel?"

"As to your wooing *any* damsel, let alone a beauteous one, I am not such an utter *amadan* as to imagine any such thing," was the poet's withering response.

"Shaun," remonstrated Patsy, "your words, to put it mildly, are hurtful, not to say blighting."

"You are going down to a Kerry farm," went on Shaun firmly, "there to learn all about cheese and butter and cows and dairymaids."

"Why a *Kerry* farm?"

"Because I want to introduce Munster Buttermilk," explained the brilliant author.

"Why not write about the beautiful Bay of Dublin, or the Dungarvan fisheries?" suggested Patsy, "and introduce a Dungarvan Hake and a couple of fresh Dublin Bay Herrings? I rather fancy myself impersonating these playful creatures, and the costume would be quite '*recherche*,' as Mark Twain said about his donkey."

"My piece is *not* for a Hippodrome; it's pure drama!"

"What will you give me if I go?" asked Patsy.

"The point is, what I shall give you if you *don't* go!"

"Am I your Slave of the Lamp, or your brother?" Patsy demanded, rather angrily.

"Don't get waxy, avic."

"Who's to pay the piper?" insisted Patsy.

"Won't you be getting a grand holiday?" argued his brother.

"I've had enough of holidays," groaned Patsy, remembering the caravan and horse.

"Well," remarked Shaun, with an air of finality, "if you don't go I shall not give you a part in our Amateur Theatricals this Christmas."

"I don't care; I can't act, anyhow."

"Oh, I know you can't, but Katie O'Farrell is taking a part."

Shaun spoke with assumed carelessness; but his brother surrendered immediately, as the wily Shaun well knew he would. For Katie was the one colleen in all the world for Patsy Murphy.

"You're an uncivilised savage," he exclaimed hotly, "to drive such a bargain!"

"Patsy," pleaded the student, "do try to be more accurate in your speech! A savage is usually uncivilised, isn't he?"

"Not always," retorted Patsy, with a meaning look into his brother's deep eyes.

"What about the dairymaid?" Shaun asked, as if wishful to change the subject.

"What dairymaid?"

"The one you're after!"

"The one *I'm* after!" echoed Patsy, in the blankest astonishment. "Shaun! I protest ——"

"You know what I mean," interposed his brother, taking up a time-table; "you shall take the 9.30 train, to-morrow morning for Beaufort, Killarney. Here is the address of a cottage in

which I have engaged a room for you. O'Sullivan is the people's name. This day month I shall expect you back with ——"

"The dairymaid?"

"Certainly not! I don't want the maid; I merely want to hear all about one."

"Very well," assented Patsy, bitterly. "But I shall never forgive you for this, the longest day I live."

"Never is a long day," observed the philosophic Shaun, who fell fast asleep immediately.

Patsy went down to Beaufort the next day, and put up at the O'Sullivan's cottage.

As he was looking out of his window the first morning, about sunrise, he saw the daintiest little colleen tripping down the boreen on her way to milking. I use the word "tripping" advisedly, for milkmaids always "trip," they never walk in the usual way. Patsy, who had arisen with the lark, owing, as he said himself, to the cocks waking him before the magpies had let him sleep, brightened up at once. "Now," he murmured, "this is my chance. I'll introduce myself to this Sylvan creature, and she shall be my teacher." So saying, he sallied forth, and soon overtook her.

"God save you, *a chailin*," said Patsy, politely raising his cap.

"God save you, kindly," was the answer, in the softest voice and prettiest accent imaginable. The girl's sweet Irish face matched her voice, and her eyes were a deep, dark blue.

"Allow me," said Patsy, taking her little milking

stool and falling into step beside her. The dairymaid regarded him in astonishment.

"Isn't it the great weather we're having," said Patsy, feeling rather at a loss how to begin a conversation.

"It is that," she agreed, "but where in the world did you come from, and have you left your manners behind you?"

"Isn't it the height of manners to be carrying this stool for you?"

"You're a stranger to me," the girl replied, with a proud little toss of her brown head.

"But I won't be for long," said Patsy earnestly. "I'm about to tell you why I spoke to you, and where I came from, and who I am, and where I am stopping."

The girl looked curiously at him, but said nothing, and Patsy continued rapidly: "My name is Patsy Murphy, and I live in Ballystack."

"It sounds like poetry," she remarked tentatively; but a more observant person than her companion would have noticed that she had started, and flushed a little, when Ballystack was mentioned.

"Bedad, it's not poetry," returned Patsy, "it takes my brother Shaun to write poetry. He writes plays and makes poetry, and tells stories as easily as the birds sing! 'Tis the great boy Shaun is and no mistake! But to make a long story short, Shaun wants to know all about Munster dairymaids, and he sent me here to gather information for him."

"Why doesn't he come himself?" asked the girl suddenly.

"Sure, he's half dead with overwork," replied Patsy. "If he doesn't call a halt, it's my belief that it's *wholly* dead he'll be by the New year!"

"Oh, God forbid!" ejaculated the girl, with fervour. "You'd better help him all you can, Mr. Murphy, and tell me what you want me to do."

"With all the pleasure in life," returned Patsy, briskly. "I want to learn all about the wild things, and singing things, and beautiful things of this world of Nature. Is your name Molly?" he added, suddenly, "because if it's not, it ought to be. Don't tell me (here his voice grew imploring) that your name isn't Molly."

"My name is Peggy," she told him, laughingly.

"Unless you drive a low-backed car, you have no business to be called Peggy," asserted Patsy with great firmness. "But anyhow, I want you to teach me all you know."

"If you want to know about wild, or singing, or beautiful things, Mr. Murphy," she replied, "it's not from me you'll learn them. I have never known cows to sing, nor are they wild. And as for beautiful things, Mr. Murphy! Glory be to goodness! Just look into the kitchen some fine day, and see if you will find anything beautiful in it!"

"I will," said Patsy, promptly, "but I won't wait for a fine day; I'll go to-morrow."

Peggy regarded him coldly. "I was speaking figuratively, Mr. Murphy," she observed.

"I'm going to see that kitchen, literally," Patsy affirmed, emphatically.

"Faith, 'tis only the door you'll see!" retorted Peggy.

By this time they were in the fields, with the cattle around them; beautiful creatures, with fragrant breath, and great soft eyes.

"Tell me about cows, Miss Peggy," said Patsy; "Isn't it delightful to see the rich buttermilk in the pails ——"

"It isn't usually buttermilk when we milk the cows," interposed Peggy mildly; "sure, even a boy or girl from the city would know that. I am afraid you will be laughed at for your ignorance, Mr. Murphy!"

Patsy heaved a sigh.

"Sometimes, however, it's buttermilk nearly; but that's only when the cows have had a game of leap-frog or hop-scotch, and got themselves churned.'

"I never understood what churning meant before!" exclaimed Patsy.

"But, indeed," Peggy went on, "the cows aren't in a fit state to milk at all, at all, when they go on like that."

"Why not? Leap-frog is a good game."

"For frogs, Mr. Murphy, not cows! Sure the poor creatures wouldn't be cows at all, after it!"

"What would they be, then?"

"Beef!"

Patsy collapsed at this unexpected answer, and lay on the grass. The girl went on steadily milking, but she kept her pretty face hidden.

"That is the reason," she resumed presently, "that beef is so scarce in Ireland. The cows are rarely gamesome enough here. The climate is too depressing, and I am told that's due to the Bog of Allen. Of course, our Kerry cows are all mad."

"You amaze me!" Patsy exclaimed, at the same time edging away from the sturdy, little black cow, Peggy was so skilfully milking.

"This is a quiet poor beast," Peggy assured him, smilingly, "she won't hurt you in the slightest."

"I am utterly confounded," said Patsy, "at the extraordinary facts you have told me."

"And well you might be, Mr. Murphy!"

"Tell me," he asked earnestly, "are all dairymaids like you?"

"Musha, no then!" returned Peggy, with a sudden flash from her mischievous Irish eyes, "at least not all!"

"Tell me more, Miss Peggy."

"I'm afraid," she observed, shaking her brown head sadly, "that it's a doctor you want, not a dairymaid."

"You are utterly and completely mistaken! What do you take me for?"

"An *amadan*, no better."

Patsy was thunderstruck! So this merry colleen took him for an *amadan*! With as much dignity as he could muster, he rose to his feet.

"And what," he asked icily, "are you?"

"A murderin' schamer, Mr. Murphy."

This frank avowal charmed Patsy, and he sat down again.

" Will you do me a favour, Miss Peggy ? " he inquired.

" A hundred, if you will."

" Then tell me *properly* all you know about farm life, so that I can make Shaun happy ."

Peggy's eyes brightened. " Do you really want to make him happy ? " she asked eagerly.

" Well, it's like this," Patsy told her candidly ; " we are having theatricals at Christmas, and the best and prettiest little colleen in the world, Katie O'Farrell, will be acting. But Shaun is writing the play, and he won't give me a part unless I bring him back working material for a drama he is now engaged upon."

" Is he very clever ? " Peggy asked suddenly.

" He's not bad ; his one great failing is that he entirely lacks a sense of humour. As a result, the Dublin managers won't accept his plays, as they want funny pieces. This last is to be a tragedy."

A sudden light flashed into the girl's eyes, and her small mouth took a curve that denoted a firm resolve.

" ' Many a misty morning turns to a bright day,' " she quoted oracularly, " and tragedy may change to comedy. Come," she added, with an amused glance at Patsy's blank face, " I'm finished milking."

" But aren't you going to help me ? " he stammered.

Peggy swung her pail of milk adroitly over her arm, and laughed.

" Help the poet Shaun, you mean ! " she cried gaily ; " Oh, to be sure, Mr. Murphy ! 'Tis the

grand farmer you'll make yourself, and no mistake."

So it came about that Patsy spent three happy weeks on the old Kerry farm. learning new, and it must be confessed, *startling* things every day. Peggy was a delightful teacher, so winsomely gay and cheery. But Patsy was greatly puzzled at the peculiar dainty air of refinement and good breeding that characterised the girl. Her speech, too, was charming, with scarcely a trace of any dialect. Altogether, it was plainly apparent that this Irish colleen with her merry smile and frank eyes was above her station.

"Are you really telling me the truth?" Patsy asked her once, when she had told him that the best way to give butter a rich, golden colour was to allow it to lie in the sun so that it could absorb the golden rays. "Because I thought a ray of light is white, and in any case," he added, "it's a sort of golden oil the butter would be if you left it in the sun."

"A ray of light, Mr. Murphy," Peggy calmly informed him, "can be divided into *three* different primary colours. It's not just white."

"Oh, Musha!" groaned Patsy, "is it science you're going to talk about now? Whoever heard a dairymaid talk science before! I return to the butter, or rather oil. Is it true, all you are telling me?"

And Peggy answered with her eyes fixed on his face, "It's as true as I'm a dairymaid." After that, Patsy could say no more.

On the night before Patsy's return to Ballystack, he received a letter from his brother. That letter almost shook Patsy's faith in women for the rest of his life.

"I took the play to the manager," wrote Shaun, "and to my horror, he laughed the whole time he was reading it. 'Mr. Murphy,' he cried, 'I congratulate you! You've made a hit at last! This is the most original farce I've ever read!' 'Farce!' I almost screamed. 'Certainly,' he replied, still laughing, 'I shall start rehearsals at once.'

"Patsy, I crept away feeling crushed! My tragedy was a farce! Could anything be more ghastly? In the name of all that's horrible, why did you write me such lies?"

Completely dazed, Patsy took this letter to Peggy. She merely smiled happily, and said, "I'm so glad."

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"You told me that your brother couldn't write anything funny, so I made up my mind to help."

"Why?"

"Well, you see," said Peggy blushing, "Shaun and I are engaged."

Patsy was almost stunned at this announcement. "Shaun engaged to a dairymaid!" he ejaculated feebly.

"But I'm not a dairymaid," explained the girl, "I'm a typist. I live in Dublin. This is only a hobby."

"Hobby!" he echoed, indignantly, "you may call telling the most appalling lies, a hobby, but

I call it depravity! You said you were a dairymaid!"

"I never said any such thing!" she replied with spirit, "you took that for granted."

"You solemnly assured me," retorted Patsy, who was getting more and more angry, "that everything you told me was true."

"I said," cried Peggy, "that everything I said was as true as that I was a dairymaid, and that wasn't true at all!"

"And yet women are not lawyers," he groaned, bitterly. But Peggy only laughed blithely—which maddened Patsy.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself!" he exclaimed indignantly, "you deceived me utterly!"

"I didn't," she denied, "I told you from the very start that I was a murderin' schamer, if you know what that means!"

Patsy was completely routed. With one parting glare, he fled, and took the next train for Ballystack. But somehow, ever since it's Patsy Murphy who has the great dislike to buttermilk.

CHAPTER VI

"GEESE"

IT was harvesting time in Ballystack, but on this particular evening the fields were deserted, excepting for one solitary figure, reclining on the grass and leaning against a hayrick. Thady O'Reilly it was, and as he would say himself, "he was in the dickens av a hole." The day before, Sadie Murphy had given him a commission in the village, but as usual, the brilliant Thady had only the vaguest idea of what it was about. So he was reclining in the hay field, a deplorable expression on his face, and bewailing his misfortune in the most lamentable manner.

"I'm desthroyed for iver!" muttered Thady: "Geese or eggs! Eggs or geese! Which was it she wanted at all? Or mebbe 'twas goslings; or for that matther, ducks or drakes. Bud if 'twas hins or chickens or even a turkey itself, sorra the bit av me knows! Och! It's the misfortunate crathure I am, an' no mistake! Geese or eggs! Eggs or ——" But here his soliloquy was interrupted by the appearance of Nora O'Mahony, who came tripping round the hay rick, a basket of fresh eggs on one arm, and a smile on her winsome face. A bunch of bright scarlet corn poppies were tucked in her belt.

"Musha, Thady," she exclaimed, "what's the matther with all the geese? I'm afther seein' them skemanderin' across the bog like murdher! Isn't that the quare way for them to be goin' on?"

"They're afeer'd av bein' kilt, Nora," replied Thady sadly.

"Ah, ye *amadan*!" returned Nora scornfully, "How would they know, if they were goin' to be killed itself?"

"Nora!" said Thady, with great solemnity, "thim geese have a powerful lot av sinse!"

"About as much as you have yourself," she observed, a little sadly.

"Throth!" exclaimed Thady with sudden energy, "an' if I had as much sinse as thim birds, it's skelpin' all over the bog I'd be meself this minute!"

"Thady, avic," the girl asked anxiously, "have you got a stroke of the sun?"

"Betther for me if I had," was the gloomy reply.

"Ah, get up an' follow the geese," cried Nora impatiently. "What's the matther with you at all?"

"I'm after desthroyin' meself intirely!"

"Oh, glory be to God!" Nora ejaculated, in horror.

"Do ye remimber," went on Thady, "Miss Sadie, at the big house beyant, tellin' me the other day that if I made wan more mistake, she'd throw me out, an' be done with me?"

"Ay, Thady."

"Well, I'm goin' to make a terrible mistake

again," said Thady mournfully, " an' she'll desthroy me, as sure as day."

" She wouldn't be so hard on you," returned Nora, consolingly. " She's a civil spoken creature enough, for all her high-falutin'."

" She is that ; howsomever —— "

" But, Thady, jewel," Nora interrupted, with a rather bewildered air, " if you know in time you're goin' to make a mistake, why can't you stop yourself makin' it ? "

Thady's blank face became still more blank at this confusing question ; for a moment he appeared quite stunned. At length he spoke.

" Musha," he said, " if I know I'm goin' to make it, I'm bound to make it, however ! " and as Nora seemed completely mystified he added sagely, " that's theology, a cholleen."

" Arrah, hould your whisht, Thady ! " exclaimed Nora, wrathfully, " 'Tis only the priests, God bless them, who can talk theology ! "

" An' the bishops, I'll go bail," remarked Thady, pensively.

" Oh, ay, the bishops," amended Nora.

" An' where do ye lave the Pope ? " asked Thady.

" Oh, don't be a gom, Thady ! " replied Nora, impatiently, " sure we all know the Pope is a powerful scholar, an' knows everything about theology."

" Bedad ! " Thady exclaimed with deep conviction, " 'tis the great man the Pope must be ! "

" An' is it the likes av you that would be thinkin'

you have as much larnin' as him ? " said Nora, contemptuously. " Sure, you're always makin' mistakes, Thady."

" Only about wan every ten minutes. But Miss Sadie has counted thim all up, an' it makes a murtherin' lot, I can tell ye ! "

" Well, now," exclaimed Nora, indignantly, " an' wouldn't ye think she'd have something better to do ? "

" She says I'm the biggest fool in the parish," groaned Thady dejectedly.

Nora flared up into sudden resentment. " Faith an' you're not ! " she cried, the bright colour flooding her fair face, " What about young Mr. O'Hagan, that gomeral that's courtin' her ! He's the biggest fool in Ireland, I don't care where the other is ! "

" The other is sittin' beside you, me jewel."

" Ah, talk sense, Thady," retorted the girl, " an' tell me what you're after doin' ! "

" Well," began Thady, " Miss Sadie gave me an ordher last night to bring up to Dunscallion a basket—no—three dozen geese."

" God betune us an' all harm ! " ejaculated Nora, aghast at this statement, " what in the name of goodness would she be wantin' three dozen geese for ? "

" Isn't that where I've made the mistake ! " explained Thady in despair ; " I disremimber whether she tould me three dozen eggs, an' wan goose ; or three dozen geese, an wan goose's egg ! Bud there's a great difference betune thim ! "

The girl looked at him sadly. " Musha, Thady," she said, " but it is the quare fool you are ! "

Thady tried to defend himself. " Sure," he exclaimed, " she was talkin' about gesse an' eggs, an' feathers, an' birds, all at the wan time, an' Master Barney was there, too, an he was talkin', an' that baste av a parrot was there, an' it was talkin', an' me head was bothered wid the three av thim ! "

Nora suddenly put up her hand to shield her hot cheeks.

" An' how did himself look ? " she asked with assumed carelessness.

" Och, much the same as usual," responded Thady, " Sure, th'oulder he grows, th' uglier he gets ; an' as for his language—be the powers, 'twould raise the dead ! "

Nora's cheeks flamed with wrath. " Arrah, what do you mane ? " she cried furiously, " 'Tis the iligent face Master Barney has, an' ——"

" Oh, that's a horse av another colour," Thady interposed ; " I thought it was that ould *amadan* av a parrot ye wor talkin' about ! "

" I've no great likin' for parrots," snapped Nora.

" No more have I," Thady agreed ; " Parrots are outlandish bastes, an' it isn't natural for dumb animals to be talkin' like a christian ! Pigs are a dale more homelike nor parrots, the cratures ! "

" But how does Master Barney look ? " persisted Nora.

" He had a face on him as long as a late breakfast."

"Musha, for what?"

"Och, there's no tellin'!" said Thady, "Mebbe he wanted to spake to Miss Sadie, an' the mane, ould baste av a parrot wouldn't let him. I wonder now," he added, struck with an idea, "if it was three dozen parrots she wanted, an' neither eggs nor geese!"

"Oh, God help you, Thady!" sighed Nora compassionately.

"Bud as you say, Nora," went on Thady dejectedly, "what would she be wantin' wid three dozen geese sthreelin' after her for?"

"There's a big enough gandher streelin' after her," retorted the girl, rather viciously, "without a string of geese as well."

"Och, bad scran to me!" cried Thady, with a sudden howl of misery, "I'm desthroyed, I tell ye!"

"Don't be screeching like that," Nora warned him, glancing anxious round the field, "someone might hear you!" Then her quick eye caught sight of a tall figure in the distance, and the bright rose colour crimsoned her cheeks.

"I see Master Barney crossin' the stile," she exclaimed, "an'—an'—be the powers, if there isn't a gandher after him!"

Thady started wildly to his feet. "Och, murdher!" he shouted, "he'll lay me stiff! He'll know it's my baste av a gandher!"

"Oh, be aisy, Thady," Nora begged, almost as frightened as himself, "he'll hear you!"

"He will," agreed Thady, who seemed in a sort

of frenzy; " an' see me, too! I'd betther be gettin' in here," and so saying, he made a dive under the hayrick.

" Arrah, come out of that! " cried Nora. " Man alive, he won't ate you! "

" Give me the nod whin he comes, Nora," said Thady, putting his head out through the hay, and coming face to face with the irate Barney, who had strode up. The young man's expression was a study, as Thady crawled slowly from under the hay, and stood blinking foolishly at him like an owl. As for Nora, she seemed rooted to the spot.

" I say, Thady," cried Barney, angrily, " do you leave your confounded geese to make war on people as they go by? Why are they not in safe custody? "

" I declare to goodness, Master Barney," returned Thady, " I often wondher why such a power av people weren't locked up long ago."

" I was talking about the geese! "

" An' I about the gandhers! "

" Look here," said Barney sternly, " I've thrashed a man before for being too funny! You are not content with letting your abominable birds stray into my property, an' ruin the barley, but you choose to be insolent as well."

" Master Barney, Master Barney! " Nora interposed eagerly, " he doesn't mane anything at all! "

Barney's angry face softened wonderfully as he looked into the girl's pleading eyes.

" Sure," she continued, still more earnestly, " he hasn't the brains to—I—I mane—he—you—the

murderin' birds went skemanderin' away on their own account, an'—an' I'll catch them in no time."

"So I haven't any brains, Miss Nora!" shouted Thady, in a sudden passion, "is that so?"

"Oh, Thady, jewel," begged the girl, "don't be mindin' me!"

But Thady was not to be mollified. He turned furiously to Barney. "Masther Barney," he cried, shaking his fist before the young man's face, "sorra the goose 'ill I take out av your barley! Ye may catch the birds yourself, an' good work for you, too, for 'tis little ye iver do only devarte yourself in that monsther av a mothor!"

"Is this man drunk?" inquired Barney in astonishment.

"I think he's taken leave of his senses," Nora replied, beginning to cry.

"You're mighty fond av callin' people names, a cholleen," went on the excited Thady, "a while ago ye said that Master Barney was——"

"Oh, Thady, Thady!" the girl interrupted wildly, don't!" "

"Was—a—a——"

"Thady!" poor Nora was in an agony of confusion, but Thady was relentless.

"A gomeral!" he shouted.

Barney started as if he had been shot, and the deep colour reddened his sun-tanned cheeks, but Thady, in a sort of delirium, continued unheedingly.

"Now ye say I'm a fool," he almost yelled, "bud, bad shoes to you, I'll show you I'm not!" And so

saying, he caught up his caubeen, and away with him like the wind, across the fields, and over the stile, to the village.

Nora turned towards Barney, but the hurt expression on his handsome face cut her to the heart. She hesitated, and the words died on her lips; then she hung her head, while two bright tears glistened on her cheek.

" So that's the kind of thing you say behind my back," Barney jerked out at length, the flush deepening on his cheeks; " I thought we were friends, Miss Nora."

" Oh, Master Barney," faltered the girl, " I—I didn't mane—I—I—he— " but her voice trailed off in a sob, and she put up her hand to shield her face. One of the little poppies dropped from her belt to the ground, and Barney stooped, and surreptitiously picked it up.

" Why do you think I'm a fool? " he asked suddenly.

" I—I—don't think it," she sobbed.

" Then why did you say it? "

No answer.

" Why did you say it? " persisted Barney.

" Sure," began Nora, " he—he—I mean ——" then she broke off in desperation, and suddenly flashed round on him, her lips quivering, her eyes shining. " Oh, lave me alone, will you! " she cried, " I don't know what I'm sayin' at all! Betune eggs an' geese, an'—an' gomerals, I'm like a bewildered barley-stack! "

For a moment Barney looked stupefied, then his

face grew a little white, and he turned on his heel away from her.

"Thank you," he observed, with icy politeness, "Good evening! I'll not trouble you further by staying. But I warn you," he added, swinging round abruptly, and speaking with sudden vehemence, "to get that—that—er—er—sweetheart of yours ——"

"What!" Nora almost shrieked; but Barney, who had worked himself up into a fury, and who was almost incoherent in his speech, continued recklessly:

"To keep his imbecile ducks, or drakes, or whatever the wretched birds are, from trespassing on my, my grounds, or I'll—I'll shoot them!"

"Musha," said Nora, plucking up a little spirit, "how could the innocent things know they were trespassin'?"

"Tell that boy of yours to keep them in order!" shouted Barney.

"What are you talkin' about at all?" exclaimed Nora, contemptuously, "Thady, my boy! Musha, is it Thady!"

"Well, and isn't it Thady?" cried the goaded Barney.

"Oh, glory be to God!" ejaculated Nora, breaking into tears. "Thady, how are ye!"

At the sight of Nora's tears, Barney's anger died as suddenly as it had come. With one stride he was beside her.

"Don't, Nora, don't, a stoir!" he pleaded, "I'm—I'm a ——"

"You're a gomeral!" interrupted Nora fiercely.

"Nora!" Barney gasped, falling back a pace.

Nora's face was burning, and the small brown hands which held the basket of eggs, trembled violently. "Botheration to you," she exclaimed, trying hard to choke back the tears, "an' to Thady, an' to all the geese and an'—an' gandhers, from here to America! I'm goin' home!"

In a flash, Barney understood. As Nora tried to pass, he stepped in front of her, and barred the way. "Nora!" he breathed. "My dear! My dear!"

The girl caught her breath, and shrank back; but Barney put his hand gently under her chin and raised the hot, shy face. She met his earnest look with one as frank and loving as his own, and then the dark eyes dropped.

"Mavourneen!" Barney said softly, putting his arm gently around her.

"Go away, will you," gasped Nora, "you'll desthroy the eggs on me."

"I'll pay for them if I do," returned Barney. "Nora, acushla, tell me! Is it—is it ——"

"Yes," cried Nora, hiding her face on his shoulder, "it's the gomeral!"

He clasped her in his arms, scarcely believing what he heard.

"Oh, Master Barney," cried the girl, trying to free herself, "mind me eggs!"

But he held her fast, with the gentleness of a strong man.

"I'm minding you, a stoir," he said, and smiled

down at her, wondering the while if it were the afterglow of the sunset that made her bonny face so bright.

"But, Master Barney," faltered Nora, "I—I thought 'twas Miss Sadie ye cared for!"

"Oh," cried Barney, laughing, "and that's why you called me a gomeral, is it?"

Nora grew crimson, and she hid her face against his coat.

"And I thought," continued Barney, "that you cared for Thady!"

The girl raised her head again, her blue eyes wide with astonishment and humour.

"Musha, is it Thady?" she said; but even as she spoke, Thady himself came rushing round the hayrick.

"Mile murdher! Mile murdher!" he shouted, "thim decavin' geese have gone up the mountains, an' I've lost thim for iver, amen!" And with that he dashed past them and was gone like a flash of lightning.

"Oh, God bless me!" gasped Nora, and in her fright she dropped the basket of eggs.

"Were those eggs for Miss Sadie, Nora?" asked Barney.

"They were that," Nora replied in despair, "an'——" but here Thady came tearing back across the field, still shouting, to Barney's amazement.

"An' now Miss Sadie 'ill have no geese at all, at all! an' she'll murdher me!" Then as he caught sight of the broken eggs, he wrung his

hands in a sort of frenzy. " Oh, Nora, Nora ! " he exclaimed, wildly, " look at the beautiful eggs, all desthroyed ! Now she'll get neither geese nor eggs ! "

He collapsed on to the grass, where he remained, apparently insensible, staring vacantly at the hayrick ; but the lovers, heedless of everything only their own happiness, wandered away together, their young faces towards the glowing west.

" I'm thinkin'," said Nora presently, and flushing as she spoke, " that it's ashamed av me, ye'll be. It's little larnin' I have. What will your father say to the likes av me bein' his son's wife ? "

" I'm thinking the same myself," was Barney's careless reply.

The colour simply burned in the girl's cheeks, and the dark head drooped low. Barney watched her keenly ; then he suddenly stopped, and taking the flushed, beautiful face between his hands, softly kissed her forehead.

" I am thinking," he said gently, " how much I have to learn as well."

" Don't ! " said Nora, a little pitifully.

" And what," continued Barney quietly, but with a glow of deep feeling lighting up his earnest face, " what have you to learn ? Just a little superficial book knowledge, that's all ! But I can learn much greater things from you, mavourneen," he added lovingly.

The tears flashed suddenly into the girl's eyes, although her face was radiant ; this complete

humility of her proud debonair lover touched her profoundly.

"We shall help each other," said Barney, and he smiled into her eyes.

And then they wandered on, still with their young faces towards the light, while the golden after-glow of sunset faded to the deep purple of evening. Little bird voices whispered to them from the hedgerows; a curlew called to them from the distant beach; and a Voice Divine spoke to their glad young souls.

But Thady still lay on the grass, staring fixedly at the hayrick, looking for all the world as if he were just recovering from a trance.

"Well now," he soliloquised, "bud it's the purty birds they wor! But which is it she wanted at all, at all! Geese or eggs, eggs or geese? Sorra the bit av me knows. Musha, Nora is right; she says I've no sense, and neither I have! Thady, a vic," he added feelingly, "you're the quare fool, an' no mistake!"

CHAPTER VII

THE O'GRADY'S NEW MAID

IT was a sunshiny morning in early summer! In the Square opposite the O'Grady's house, trees and flowers and birds were holding joyous revels, for the tears of April had given place to the smiling of dancing, jocund May. The air was laden with the spicy fragrance of hawthorn, as the pink and white blossoms were tossed hither and thither by the breeze.

The may is Our Lady's special tree, and its dainty flowers unfold their scented petals in Mary's month; greeting, with golden breath, the gentle Queen of May.

Purple and white lilacs wafted their sweetness to the dusty city; while the mavis' mellow notes mingled melodiously with the clear, glad call of the chaffinch.

The sonorous bell of St. Andrew's church earnestly invited the people to eight o'clock Mass, and in the distance another metallic voice from the "Colliers' church," hard by the quays and wharves of old Dublin, echoed the same invitation.

Let poets sing of purple hills; of deep, shadowy valleys, of sparkling rivers, rippling over brown mossy stones! Let painters immortalise these wonders in vivid colours for, indeed, they are

worthy of admiration! But to me, there is something in the busy city, teeming with restless, ceaseless activity, more attractive than hill or dale or rippling river! Especially does the town appeal to me when spring flings her glowing green banner to the bright sky, transforming each gloomy street, and sombre house, and murky alley into a city of shining light!

We dwellers in the town may lack, indeed, the lark's ecstatic trill as it mounts on tireless pinions, or the cuckoo's cry, or the linnet's delicate song! But do not our suburbs resound with the free, joyous call of the chaffinch, the blackbird's clear whistle, and the rich liquid music of the throstle's notes?

And when summer's splendid green has changed to the red and brown of autumn, does not the tender music of the robin's song bring a thrill of gladness to tired city hearts? Like silver drops of dew, touched with magic iridescent light, that tiny voice speaks to discouraged souls, of hope eternal and peace divine. A very cobweb of fragile, exquisite minstrelsy, is the song of the redbreast!

Perhaps we miss the stray primrose or sweet violet nestling in the deep woods, or the hardy cowslip springing up in every green meadow! But the pink-tipped, golden-hearted daisy lifts its innocent face from the grass, ready for grimy little hands to gather, and the daffodil tosses its glowing head as bravely in a tiny suburban garden as on the windy heather.

We may wish sometimes for the forest trees, the giant oaks, or noble yews, but the sturdy sycamore we always have in our parks, and tired workers can rest beneath its branches; and year by year the golden laburnum and delicate lilac delight us with their beauty.

And spring throws her mantle of exquisite green over the dusty, smoke begrimed city, as well as the verdant countryside. Not all the changeful splendour of autumn's glowing tints can rival this vernal, wondrous green of laughing spring!

But the beauties of spring, whether in the country or city, has nothing to do with Mr. and Mrs. O'Grady or with their new maid, and that is what I want to tell you about.

Well, the young husband and wife were seated this morning at the pretty breakfast table in the beautiful old house whither Donal had brought his bride. Belinda was looking prefectly charming in a dainty morning gown of steel grey, her golden curls tied loosely back with a simple, blue ribbon.

Donal himself was a tall young man, with a quantity of black hair. He brushed these raven locks every morning for three-quarters of an hour with two hard brushes, so that they would be glossy. For Donal was the boy who thought a great deal about his appearance! And, indeed, he was a handsome young fellow, although he was obliged to wear spectacles.

I am afraid the O'Gradys were rather sentimental. They invariably addressed each other by some endearing, and very often, ludicrously in-

appropriate term. For instance, Belinda usually called her husband, "Dickybird"! As if a bird ever brushed its hair, or ever possessed hair to brush, or ever wore spectacles! But the O'Gradys both were young, and all their friends fondly hoped that they would grow wiser in time.

It was Belinda who first broached the subject of the new maid. "Dickybird," said she, "don't you think we should engage a new parlour-maid at once?"

"Certainly, Ladybird; do you know of any suitable person?"

"I know of a girl, Lovebird, only no one will recommend her."

"Then don't have her!" said Donal promptly; "she may not be at all a suitable person, and might worry my colleen out of her little life."

"Darling!" she cried fervently, "you are a dear, thoughtful Dickybird! But it will be all right about the girl, you know."

"But I don't know! How should I?"

"Well, you see," Belinda explained, "although nobody will recommend her, nobody has anything to say against her. So I'll give the girl a ——"

"How do you know she's a girl?"

"She's not a boy, anyhow!" retorted the Ladybird, with some heat.

"But she may be quite an elderly person," remonstrated Donal, "my Ladybird has a very bad habit of calling all maidservants 'girls.'"

"Well, aren't they girls?" argued Belinda, hotly.

" 'The maid,' is the proper term for a servant girl," was the firm reply.

" She might be a widow ! " cried Belinda, " and then where would be the sense of calling her a maid ? "

" You know perfectly well," began Donal, but Belinda cut him short.

" We usually call a servant 'the girl,' in the country," said she.

" But we are not in the country now," Donal pointed out, " we are in the city of Dublin, which is the capital of Ireland."

" Oh, Donal ! " exclaimed Belinda, reproachfully, " you are annoying ! "

" I'm awfully sorry," he murmured.

" You needn't be so quick in taking up every countryism I use," went on his wife in aggrieved tones ; " You yourself are always using Oxfordisms ! 'Awfully sorry' isn't good English at all ! "

With great dignity Donal rose from the table.

" Oh, Dickybird ! " exclaimed Belinda piteously, " surely you are not going to get angry with your Ladybird ? "

" I am not going to get angry, because I am angry already."

" Do sit down again," Belinda implored, " and let me give you another cup of coffee and some more marmalade. I made it myself in dear old Dunscallion."

Donal accepted the proffered delicacies, and was instantly mollified. What Oxford Dickybird would

not be soothed and uplifted under the combined influence of coffee and marmalade!

"Now listen to me," cried Belinda, dramatically waving a spoonful of marmalade to emphasise her words: "I'm going to give this girl, *maid*, a trial! I——"

"*Where* are you going, and when?" interrupted her husband.

Belinda stared. "I'm going nowhere!" said she. "What's wrong with you, Donal?"

"You said that you were 'going' to give this maid a trial, so I inferred that you were going somewhere."

Belinda gave a profound sigh, "Oh, dear," she said sadly, "but you're a great trial to me!"

"I'm awfully sorry, *exceedingly* sorry, I mean!" remarked Donal.

"As I was saying," Mrs. O'Grady continued, "I *intend* (she emphasised the word to show Donal that she knew quite well why he had interrupted her) giving this maid a trial. I am perfectly sure she will suit, as I mean to manage her properly."

"Which means, I suppose, that other people do not manage maids properly."

"They don't!" agreed Belinda, calmly, "but in my case, it will be different. I shall not spoil a maid. Of course, I shall be kind, but *very firm*! I shall have my maid to understand that I am mistress; she shall be perfectly respectful to me, and obliging; I shall be courteous to her but never too friendly. I——"

"Sounds rather like Polonius' parting advice to

Laertes," observed Donal, in thoughtful tones. "Are you thinking of going on the stage, Ladybird?"

"Certainly not!" returned his wife, "but between ourselves, Donal, I think my future sister-in-law, Peggy, is going on the stage!"

"Really!" exclaimed Mr. O'Grady, quite astonished.

Belinda nodded sagely. "Shaun's last play has 'caught on' tremendously with the managers of the 'Excelsior Players'; and as Peggy made such a perfect success of the principal part in real life, they wish her to do it on the stage. And they've asked Patsy, too."

"Oh, I say," cried Donal in high delight, "you and I will take a box at the Gaiety when that play is on, and we'll have a good time, shan't we?"

"Let us take a box for the whole week, even if we don't occupy it every night?" she begged eagerly. "Will you, Donal? The better the booking, the better it will be for Shaun."

"Of course, I'll take a box for the week," Donal assured her, "I'll take all six if you like, Ladybird."

His wife's face beamed with pleasure. "You're too good to me," she said, gratefully; then she crossed to his side, still holding the spoon, and perching herself on the arm of his chair, gave him a loving hug. "Won't it be grand!" she cried, enthusiastically, "fancy seeing Peggy on the stage, being applauded, and then hearing cries for 'Author! Author!' and seeing Shaun come solemnly to the footlights and bowing, and people

clapping their hands, and perhaps waving their hats like this (she swung the spoon wildly in the air) and then the papers ——" but here the excited girl suddenly discovered that all the marmalade had dropped off the spoon on to the spotless tablecloth.

"Oh, Donal," she groaned, "my beautiful cloth, and it's real Irish linen from Belfast."

"It's the real Irish marmalade from Dunscallion that I'm thinking about," remarked Donal, pensively regarding the golden jelly. "The cloth will wash, but the marmalade is a case of Humpty Dumpty."

A smile curved the young wife's lips, for she was highly gratified that Donal appreciated her preserve.

"By the way," he observed presently, "what is this person's name of whom we were speaking?"

"Her name is Brigid, but she calls herself Bedelia."

"Why Bedelia?"

"Bedelia is the genteel way, according to the new American idea, of saying 'Brigid.'"

"Is this female an American, then?"

"Oh, no, she's Irish, from Dublin. But like a great many people of the present day, she's ashamed of her native name. It's disgraceful!" added the girl, with sudden bitterness.

Donal regarded her in surprise. "But, my dear," he said gently, "isn't your own name Brigid, and yet you are called Belinda?"

"It isn't exactly my fault," explained his wife,

flushing as she spoke. "It was just a silly idea of the girls and even the teachers at school. They called my sister 'Sadie,' although her name is Sarah."

"But why did they want to change your names?"

"They thought it more genteel," sighed Belinda.

"It may be more genteel, but it certainly is not more sonorous," observed Donal rather dryly.

"Oh, Donal, I've got an idea!" exclaimed his wife with great animation; "start calling me my proper name! Call me Brigid for the future."

"Why, that's powerful," agreed Donal, with a very loving glance at the girl's glowing face. "Of course, I'll call you Brigid! And now, Brigid," he added laughingly, "I'll say good-bye to you, a stoir, for all the bells have stopped and it must be past eight o'clock."

Brigid (as we must call her) went with him to the door to see him off.

"Slan agat," said he, as they parted, "take care of yourself until I come back."

But when Donal returned that evening, he heard strange sounds through the house. A policeman was standing beside a lamp-post opposite, taking notes, and occasionally glancing up at the windows, a look of profound amazement on his wooden countenance.

Donal entered the house hastily and made his way to the drawing room, where he found his wife with rather a scared face.

"Well, Ladybird," he cried cheerily, as he kissed her, "has the new maid arrived yet?"

"Oh, Dickybird," exclaimed Brigid, "she has, surely, and—and I'm afraid she's queer!"

"Queer!" he echoed, rather blankly.

"She has broken three lovely cut glass jugs, wedding presents, already, and I know they cost no less than seven shillings each."

Donal whistled. "I admit," said he, "that I am a fairly rich man, but I couldn't possibly afford that, Lovebird."

"Of course you couldn't," Brigid agreed, tearfully, "and then there's that foolish policeman up against that lamp post the whole afternoon. We'll be ruined," she added despairingly; "What will all the people of the Square think?"

"They'll think he's an ass," said Donal.

"Fancy a policeman standing outside one's house all day taking notes!" wailed Brigid. "It's too ridiculous!"

"I wish he were inside this house, taking Bedelia into custody!" Donal snapped, viciously. "Is she violent, may I ask?"

"She's got a strange way of going on, anyhow."

"Why not try firmness, my dear?"

"The young wife almost sobbed. "It won't work!" she cried, "Bedelia treats me like a child! the first thing she asked me was my age, and when I refused to tell her she said I looked forty!"

"How unkind!" murmured Donal, sympathetically, "and how untrue!"

"And she's got such a curious method of walking, too! It's not really walking at all; it's more like waltzing. She waltzes about like an insane tee-to-

tum, and comes slap bang up against one. And then she throws things about so! It's positively dangerous to enter the kitchen! She —— "

Here the door suddenly flew open and a fanastic figure whisked into the room. It was the new maid.

" Bedelia," said her mistress severely, " why do you come into a room without knocking? What do you want? "

" I wanted to see what sort the masther is."

Donal collapsed with a stifled laugh on to the sofa, but his wife was furious.

" It's not your business to come and look at the master! " she flashed.

" Throth," said Bedelia, " he's not much to look at, anyway."

Brigid grew crimson with anger.

" Well, of all the impertinence! " she gasped. Then she swung round, and pointed dramatically to the door; " Leave the room," she commanded, in wrathful tones.

" The din—— " began Bedelia, but the exasperated Ladybird would not listen.

" Leave the room! " she reiterated vehemently.

The maid made another attempt to speak, but was frustrated by her irate mistress.

Then Bedelia retreated backwards towards the door, playing havoc with everything as she went.

" Oh, I'm goin'! " she exclaimed, " it's the terrible timper ye have intirely."

" My dear," said Donal, as soon as they were

alone ; " You must get rid of this very—er—extraordinary person at once."

" Never ! " cried Brigid heroically, " I'll conquer her yet ! You and I together ought to be a match for her ! "

" We ought ! " he agreed, doubtfully, " but somehow, I don't think we shall be."

He was right ; they certainly were not. As the cook and butler were both out that evening, Bedelia was to have cooked the dinner, and served it by six o'clock. But as half past seven chimed, and no dinner appeared, Brigid descended to the kitchen to see after it. She found the new maid seated before the fire reading *The Shamrock*.

" Bedelia," said Mrs. O'Grady, " is dinner ready ? "

Bedelia slowly turned a page, and continued reading.

" Bedelia ! " repeated the mistress, desperately, " do you hear me ? "

" Faith an' I do," returned Bedelia.

" Then answer me properly."

" Is it the dinner you're afther ? "

" Yes ! Is it ready ? "

" Sure, it's ready these two hours an' more, woman dear," was the calm reply.

" Why didn't you tell me ? " gasped Belinda.

" Didn't I thry to tell you a while ago, an' you toult me to lave the room ! "

Brigid fled to the drawing-room, completely crushed.

As Donal was pulling down the blinds he noticed that the solitary policeman had been reinforced ;

one of these sages had a pocket camera, with which he was preparing to take a snapshot photograph of the house, while the others were busily taking notes. But the first policeman was quite used up, and leant against the lamp post, apparently in some sort of a fit. Donal viewed this interesting group in speechless indignation, then jerked the blind down savagely.

By and by, some visitors arrived, and Brigid went to the kitchen to prepare coffee. She found that the maid had wasted all the milk, making pancakes for herself to eat. Brigid at once sent her for more milk. She soon returned, crying at the top of her voice : " The cow ! The cow ! "

" I didn't send you for a cow, I sent you for milk ! " cried the distracted Ladybird.

" But the cow won't let me get the milk ! " lamented Bedelia. " She's standin' behind the dairy door winkin' at me, an' sure I daren't go in ! "

" Go back and get some milk ! "

But Bedelia wouldn't stir, and the visitors were obliged to go without coffee.

And this was only the beginning ; as the days went by, the new maid grew worse and worse. Brigid became pale and lost her appetite, while Donal's handsome face assumed a furtive expression, and he began to go in and out by the tradesmen's entrance, hoping the policeman would not recognise him. " The life of a worm would be preferable," he said to his wife, one evening, and she answered wearily : " Yes, dear, even a mere

worm is treated with more respect than we are by Bedelia. She won't ever say 'ma'am' or 'sir.' 'He came in, and asked me where you were, and I told him you were out.' That's how she talks about us."

"And you know," exclaimed Mr. O'Grady, suddenly firing up, "it's simply intolerable trying to put up with her fads! When she's dusting my study she stands round asking me absurd questions, even though I'm writing important briefs! I should like," he added, bringing down his closed fist on a silken cushion with a savage bang, "to—to smash her!"

"And sometimes," remarked Brigid, in a far away voice, "she won't come into a room. I generally have to shout my orders through the keyhole."

"I'm wondering how long we shall last," Donal observed, dully.

That evening Brigid told the maid that she was expecting her sister up from the country.

"Is she like yourself?" coolly inquired Bedelia.

"Do you mean in appearance and manners?"

"Ay, do I."

"Well, yes, she is something like me."

"Is she older than yourself?"

"That is a very rude question, and I refuse to answer it," returned the mistress coldly.

"Because if she is," said Bedelia, quite unabashed, "she must be a whopper!"

Brigid retired to the drawing-room, where she wept copiously until the arrival of her sister.

After an affectionate greeting, the young wife led Sadie round the house, proudly pointing out the antique, finely carved mantel-pieces, and beautifully moulded ceilings, and massive old doors.

Mute but eloquent witnesses are these relics of an historic past! Reminiscent of the time when glittering carriages swept up to these same houses; when stalwart men and exquisitely gowned women passed with stately mien through the great lofty rooms; when the grey city was all excitement as each Parliament came or dissolved; when the voices of some of the most able speakers who ever graced a House, rang through the old House of Parliament, College Green! Ah! faithful witnesses are all these treasures of a city's famous past, before the glories of old Dublin had faded, perhaps for ever!

But of none of these things was Brigid thinking; for on coming to a room, the door of which was beautifully carved, she found to her horror, that it was nearly all missing. She called Bedelia frantically.

"Bedelia! Where is the study door?"

"Isn't it there?"

"Should I be looking for it if it were here?".

"Musha, thin, an' ye might! It's the quare things ye do be doin'."

"Come up at once, and tell me what you've done with the door!" commanded her mistress, white with anger.

"Do ye think I have it in me pocket?" asked

Bedelia. But she ascended the stairs in a leisurely manner, and looked with a sort of calm wonder at the wrecked door.

"Well, that bates Bannaher!" she exclaimed, adding sagely, "it's gone, sure enough."

But Brigid was so overcome at the ruin of the priceless old door that she sobbed helplessly.

When Donal came home he was appalled at what had occurred. "Ladybird," he said sadly, "Bedelia *must* go!"

"I shan't be able to make her go!" wailed his wife, despairingly.

"Make the attempt, anyhow," he counselled, and she made the attempt accordingly.

The next evening Sadie went home, but Bedelia was still there. A few days afterwards, Brigid wrote a frantic letter to her mother, begging her to come up to town. Mrs. Murphy went immediately to her daughter's assistance. Some weeks later, Mr. Murphy received a wire from Donal, telling him that his wife had been removed to Baggot Street hospital, and that Brigid was in a serious state of collapse. Mr. Murphy left his business instantly and took the first train up to Dublin. A considerable period elapsed without news, and the young people were beginning to grow anxious.

One morning they were horrified to see the following paragraph in a Dublin paper: "We very much regret that Mr. O'Grady, of Merrion Square, the rising young barrister, is suffering from a complete nervous breakdown. His charming wife, and

her father and mother, are also very ill. The family have left Dublin for the Continent."

"But what has made them ill?" gasped Sadie.

"The new maid," affirmed Brian, gravely.

"It would make a first-rate comedy," remarked the pale student, Shaun.

"Or a capital tragedy," supplemented Patsy.

"Or both," observed his brother, in dreamy tones; "I shall go and begin a play at once." And so saying, Shaun wandered into the shrubbery.

CHAPTER VIII

THE REHEARSAL

"THESE theatricals," said Shaun Murphy in positive tones, "are going to be the thing of the season."

"Have you got the play completely cast yet?" asked Sadie.

"Certainly," and he proceeded to tell the different characters, and the cast.

"You've left out the principal person," remarked Patsy.

"And who is that?"

"The prompter."

"Oh," exclaimed Shaun, "Belinda, otherwise Brigid, is remaining with us till after Christmas, so she can prompt."

"But the play is not to last from this to Christmas, is it?" objected Patsy.

"It is not," agreed his brother, "and neither will you, if you don't take care of yourself."

"Why didn't you let me play the part of 'Alfred'?" asked Patsy. "I'm as good an actor as Barney O'Hagan, only I'm not nearly so good-looking."

"We know you're a good actor," said Sadie, before Shaun could answer, "and that's the reason I wouldn't let Shaun give you the principal part!

You're too good, in fact. You don't think, for a moment, do you," she added scornfully, " that we're a lot of goms to be taken in by you every day we live ? "

" What do you mean at all ? " questioned Patsy.

" I mean," continued his sister, deliberately, " that we all know you are acting being an *amadan* always ! You behave like an utter *amadan* ! An inane *amadan* ! A maddening, nerve-destroying *amadan* ! But you are not an *amadan*, just a clever actor ! "

" Ye gods ! " ejaculated Patsy.

" Sadie has told you the first reason," went on Shaun, " the other reason is that as you are already engaged to Katie O'Farrell, the heroine of the piece, it wouldn't be acting at all."

" It would be very realistic, and the audience would like it."

" The very essence of the actor's art," began Shaun, pompously, " consists of his being able to *act* living a part, not *really* living it ! Anyone could live certain parts. If —— "

" You couldn't ! " said Patsy, unexpectedly.

" And why couldn't I ? "

" Because if you really loved Katie, I'd play Rugby football with you."

Just then the parlour clock struck eight.

" Shaun," asked Sadie, " do you know the time ? "

" No, and neither do you, Sadie."

" Pardon me, Shaun, my watch makes it twenty-five minutes to nine."

" Excuse me, Sadie," said her brother gently,

" but the hall clock made it twenty-five minutes to nine, ten minutes ago."

" Even the clocks seem to be acting a part in this house," Patsy observed thoughtfully. " We are all shamming! Nothing is real! Think of Shaun's hair, for instance."

" My hair is real; I don't wear a wig!"

" I mean that the way you wear it, long and straight, is not real! It's affected. But there's one thing that's real at any rate," he added with a chuckle, " and that is Sadie's temper. That's not a sham!"

" Well," said his sister calmly, " I'm honest about it, anyhow. I know I've a frightful temper, and this sort of conversation doesn't improve it, either."

" Let's go back and talk about the time," suggested Patsy. " What time is it?"

" I don't know at all," Shaun admitted, although he always wore a splendid watch given him by his father.

" Neither do I," said Sadie; " but I do know that these people were to have been here at seven, for rehearsal!"

" Heaven save me from amateur theatricals again!" groaned Shaun. " It makes life not worth living. If one says a word to Katie O'Farrell she eats the head off him or her! If ——"

" If you say a word against Katie," exclaimed Patsy, " I'll eat the head off you!"

" Hush!" whispered Sadie; " I hear some one coming."

The door opened, and Katie O'Farrell came hurriedly into the room.

"So sorry," she exclaimed gushingly, "but I couldn't possibly come any sooner. I met Denis and your brother outside."

Brian and Denis came sauntering in together as she spoke.

"I'm afraid we're a bit late," Brian remarked.

"God save all here," said Denis, "and does any one know the words yet?"

"Certainly not!" returned Brian, quite surprised at the idea; "we have another week yet. I'll be all right on the night."

"I wonder what has become of Thady!" Denis observed.

"Loafing, as usual," said Brian.

"Really!" Sadie exclaimed, heatedly, "it's disgraceful! We'll never have the play ready!"

"Supposing we start rehearsing," Shaun suggested, and began to prepare the stage. The "setting" was exceedingly primitive. A sweeping-brush, a chair, and a little stool constituted the whole.

"Now, we're ready," remarked Shaun, with great satisfaction; "Katie, you begin, you know."

"She doesn't know," observed Mrs. O'Grady, who had come in, "I'll prompt."

"'How sweetly,'" began Katie, in rather stilted tones.

"'Softly,'" prompted Mrs. O'Grady.

"It's almost the same thing!"

" Rock candy is sweet, but it isn't soft ! " flashed Sadie.

" Yes," retorted Katie, " and you're soft, but you aren't sweet ! "

" You must say what's in the script ! "

" I'm only an amateur ! " cried Katie shrilly ; " I won't be ' musted ' ! "

" It's plain to be seen that you are only an amateur," was the crushing retort.

" And I," Shaun announced, wearily passing his fingers through his dark hair, " happen to be stage manager. Go on with the play."

" Why doesn't my husband write to me ? " lamented Mrs. O'Grady, her voice rising and falling like the *keen* of a Banshee.

" Good heavens ! " exclaimed Brian, quite astounded ; " is that a new bit in the play ? "

" Of course it isn't," snapped his sister ; " Hold your tongue, Belinda, and prompt ! "

" My name is Brigid," wailed the prompter, " and if I hold my tongue, how can I prompt ? "

" Proceed, ' Viola,' " said Shaun, in dull tones.

" ' How softly the sun sinks to rest ! The —— ' "

" But you know," interrupted Denis, " that's a foolish expression ! How else could the sun sink ? "

" I know of a place where it sets with an unearthly bang." Patsy informed them.

" Where's that ? " was the breathless inquiry.

" Kingstown, Dublin."

" After these two exhibitions of crass ignorance," remarked Shaun dryly, " we will proceed with the play."

Katie began again, accordingly: "'How softly the sun sinks to rest! The golden glory in the west——'" here she stopped, and appealed to Shaun.

"Is it supposed to be poetry?" she asked.

"*No!*"

"'Shines,'" continued Katie, "'like—like—'"

"You're all wrong," interposed Mrs. O'Grady; "begin all over again."

"Why didn't you prompt?"

"You wouldn't take the last prompt!"

Katie's retort was interrupted by the entrance of Barney, cheery, debonair, and inclined to be a little dictatorial.

"Sorry to be so late," said he, "but I met Thady O'Reilly, and he kept me. I mean, I kept him."

"What's he doing?" asked Brian, "getting drunk, I suppose!"

"Certainly not," returned Barney, "Thady is always as sober as a judge, and as foolish, too."

"I was rehearsing the first scene, Mr. O'Hagan," Katie told him, with great dignity.

"Then go ahead," said Barney, beginning as usual, to stage-manage the whole thing.

"'How softly'" began Katie, for the third time, "the sun sinks to——"

"Oh, speak up, Viola!" advised Barney; "why you wouldn't be heard without ear trumpets!"

"People don't usually shout their sentimental sentiments.'"

"Neither do they mumble them." Then as

Katie glared at him indignantly, Barney added hastily: "Sorry, Miss O'Farrell, don't mind me."

"Begin at 'behind the castle walls,'" said Shaun.

"'Behind the castle walls,'" repeated Katie, "'it reflects'"——

"It doesn't," Sadie contradicted.

"What does it do then? Prompt, please."

"This prompter is hopeless," remarked Denis.

"She isn't!" flashed Sadie.

"Why doesn't my husband write to me!" keened the prompter.

"He'd be a fool if he did," Patsy chuckled.

"It's a kindergarten teacher that's required here," said Sadie, in a loud voice, "not a prompter."

"Your gestures won't do, Viola," Barney observed; "they are too automatic and jerky."

"'Come, Alfred,'" continued Katie, unheedingly, "'my heart breaks——'"

"'Aches.'"

"What!"

"'Aches!'" in a loud tone.

"So does my head!" groaned the stage manager, tossing back his hair wildly.

"We can't hear this prompter," lamented Katie.

"Oh, go on!"

"'Come, Alfred, my beloved! My heart aches for your coming——'"

"You've skipped twenty lines," the prompter calmly remarked.

"I don't care! 'Come, Alfred, my beloved—' Where is Alfred?"

"He's loafing, didn't I tell you," repeated Brian.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Sadie, "he's fooling, like the gom he is! Mr. O'Hagan is 'Alfred.' Didn't you know that, Barney? Haven't you got the script?"

Barney stared blankly, and then whistled; but he had the grace to look ashamed of himself.

"Yes," he admitted, but I forgot all about it."

Shaun groaned, but Sadie's hot temper flared up at once.

"You're mean!" she cried, "you promise to do a thing, and then forget! I reckon you don't forget to meander about the country in your motor car!"

Barney's grey eyes flashed ominously, for his temper was just as quick as Sadie's, only he had it under control. "I shall be all right on the night," said he, colouring, "Denis will read the part now. Come on, Denis."

Denis complied at once, and Katie and he embraced.

"Oh, that's simply impossible!" exclaimed Barney; "Who ever saw lovers embrace like that? Put some 'go' in the thing! I'll show you"; and to Patsy's unspeakable chagrin, Barney proceeded to put his arms gently around Katie, so that her curly head rested on his shoulder.

"'My dearest —'" began Katie, "'I——I —'"

"'As I watched,'" the prompter cried, with appalling suddenness.

Katie was so startled that she gave a wild jump out of Barney's arms, and landed right on Denis's

foot. He yelled "Murder!" and went limping about the room.

"What are you shrieking for?" demanded Katie, indignantly.

"I was afraid," returned Mrs. O'Grady, with calm irony, "that I might not be heard."

"I'm not deaf!"

"You seemed so, a few minutes ago."

"Oh, go on with the play," admonished Barney, "settle that point next Christmas, two years. Go ahead, Viola."

"'As I watched the sun glint on the oak, I —'"

"Felt like having a right good smoke," supplemented Patsy. But Sadie fell on him, and flung him off the sofa, where he lay like a log.

"I say, Sadie, you'll kill somebody yet," remonstrated Barney.

"We'll start where Shaun comes in as the father. Cue, please."

"'My father,'" prompted Mrs. O'Grady; but Denis and Katie were in deep conversation, and never heard a word.

"'My father!'" repeated Mrs. O'Grady loudly; but the players were apparently deaf. "'My father!'" she exclaimed frantically. "Gracious heaven! Are you bothered?" Still no response.

"'My father!'" she shrieked, "do you hear me prompting?" but evidently they did not.

The goaded prompter then rose up, stamping her foot, and yelled: "Will you listen to the prompt?" But they would not listen.

Mrs. O'Grady fell back exhausted in her chair,

and gasped out : " It's no use prompting ! " Then she broke down completely, and sobbed loudly and long.

" She's going into a fit ! " cried Sadie, while Barney rushed for water. Shaun made a valiant effort, as stage-manager, to exert his authority, " What about the play ? " he called out.

" Oh, yes, I forgot," remarked Katie, quite casually ; " my cue to you is, ' my father ! ' "

Shaun limped towards her (as if old men *always* limp), saying in the voice of a raven : " ' Viola, my daughter.' "

" Is that your natural voice, Shaun, or are you a ventriloquist ? " asked Barney in amazement.

" I'm hoarse," said Shaun.

At this moment Patsy lit a cigar. Remembering, however, that Sadie abhorred smoking, he secretly slipped the cigar into Barney's hand, who began to smoke, quite unconsciously.

" ' My dearest daughter,' " began Shaun, " ' I —' "

" Put that out ! " commanded Sadie furiously.

" But it's in the play," reasoned her brother, who thought she was referring to the words.

" It isn't ! " and she snatched the offending weed out of Barney's hand and threw it into the fire.

The young man's handsome face flushed scarlet.

" I really beg your pardon, Sadie," he said, in genuine distress. " I—I honestly quite forgot you objected so much to smoking. In fact," he added helplessly, " I don't even remember lighting that cigar, I had no intention of doing so, really."

"You've been drinking, Barney!" chuckled Patsy.

"It's all right," Sadie said hurriedly, feeling ashamed of her outburst. "Go on, Katie."

"'I come to hear,'" began Katie, and then stopped. "What's Alfred doing here, now?" she asked. "He ought to be dead long ago."

"He *will* be dead soon, if he's not careful!" muttered the stage manager, darkly. "Why don't you go away, Denis?"

"I haven't got the cue."

"You wouldn't know it, if you did get it," Sadie informed him.

"I—I—don't know any more," Katie confessed.

"Well," observed Barney, cheerfully, "you couldn't very well know less! As for this staging," he added, glancing at the brush, "it's simply ghastly!"

"Am I, or you, stage manager?" barked Shaun, in sudden impotent fury.

"If that's a conundrum," said the tantalising Barney, "I can't solve it; but if it's a scientific problem, I'll work it out for you, and send the solution by telegram."

"Who wrote the play?" asked the author, in a far away voice.

"Another problem," groaned Barney. "As a matter of fact, I think we all did! It's a new play every night."

"Better start your scene with Sadie."

Immediately Denis and Katie began an animated

conversation in piercingly loud tones, with occasional bouts of laughter.

" ' If our daughter were sorrowful,' " said Shaun, struggling to keep his mind from going, " ' she'd—she'd ——' "

Here Katie, who was telling a story about a dog, called out loudly : " bark like a mad dog," which completely bewildered Shaun.

" ' She'd—she'd,' " he stammered, " ' bark like a mad dog, I ——' Oh, heavens ! " he gasped, clutching his hair wildly, " I'm losing the bit of sense I had."

Barney collapsed on to the sofa, in sudden, helpless mirth, but Sadie was furious.

" Will you be quiet ? " she exclaimed wickedly, " you—you fools ! "

There was a dread silence, broken only by Barney's stifled laughter. Just then Thady strolled into the room. " God save all here," he said, " barrin' the cat." Then he caught sight of Barney, and tried to back out again ; but he tripped over that young gentleman's foot (purposely stretched out) and fell with a crash.

" Oh, mile murdher ! " he exclaimed, in horror, " bud it's the powerful big feet ye have."

" Are we rehearsing or not ? " inquired Brian, sarcastically.

" It looks more like a Corporation meeting," said Barney, springing up. " Let us rehearse the procession. Come, now. Get up, you *amadan*," he added, helping Thady to his feet.

Everyone started to amble round the room.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Barney, "this is not supposed to be a funeral! It's a bridal procession! Don't shuffle along like so many monkeys!"

"Do monkeys usually attend funerals?" asked Sadie, with a mocking smile.

"Get into your place," he advised her, "or you'll be attending your own funeral, monkey or no monkey."

At that moment a clock struck eleven.

Instantly they all remembered that they had had previous engagements and everyone rushed pell-mell out of the house. Barney and Thady collided violently and rolled down a flight of stairs, while Barney exclaimed deliriously: "It's a corpse I'll be when my father gets me this night!" Hatless and breathless they tore along the corkscrew drive, Thady crying at the top of his voice: "Mile murdher! Mile murdher! All the ilegant turkeys 'ill be travellin' the rocky road to Dublin, before I can catch thim, an' sorra the taste av a bird 'ill there be in Ballystack for the Christmas! Och! Thady O'Reilly, bud 'tis the misfortunate gom ye are, an' no mistake."

CHAPTER IX

A MISTAKE

IT was the night of the Murphy's Christmas party. Already the tables in the long dining-room groaned under their load of good things, for the clock pointed to the hour of six. Belinda and her sister were decked in their best, and Mrs. Murphy shone resplendent in black silk. Belinda was in great spirits, as her husband had not only written at last, but had come down to spend Christmas with her in her old home. All the young men had donned evening dress, and Mr. Murphy was suffering refined torture because he wasn't used to high collars, and they nearly "cut the neck off him," as he complained bitterly to Shaun.

Practically every one of importance in Ballystack and the neighbouring villages had been invited to the party, and every one, even Mr. McKenna, had accepted the invitation. The Murphys had intended starting the entertainment with tea; then having the theatricals, after which would come supper, and last, but not least, a dance in the great drawing-room. The first part of the programme, however, had to be cancelled altogether, for divers reasons. To begin with, only three out of all the performers had learnt their part, namely, Sadie, Shaun, and

Barney; for Barney, to do him justice, had honestly done his best towards the end. But even this faithful three found, at the last moment, that for some mysterious reason, they had completely forgotten every word! Then they discovered that Belinda's cat and Sadie's parrot, had between them, consumed the script, and that finished the whole thing.

At half past six the guests began to arrive, and the Murphys hospitably flocked to the hall door, and even down the snowy steps to welcome them. A slight accident occurred, however, on the arrival of Major Hamilton. That gentleman's coachman, who had never been to Dunscallion before, and was unacquainted with the eccentricities of the corkscrew drive, drove his master's carriage and pair round to the back door, to the great amusement of the servants. Barney, who had just motored up with his father, went round, with the best intentions in the world, to explain. The Major, however, who had already reduced his coachman to a state bordering on imbecility, now turned on Barney, blaming him for the mistake. That unlucky young man, who seemed to be always getting into trouble with the irascible Major, was quite stunned at the unexpected onslaught. He answered never a word, but just stared at his aggressor with a sort of dazed wonder. Whereupon Major Hamilton demanded why he was standing there arguing like a gramaphone, confusing the servants and interfering with everyone. But Miles, who had come round with his car, was

so enraged by the Major's attack that he rolled up his sleeves and was about to smash that officer when Barney suddenly perceived his intentions, and frustrated them.

"Let me at him!" panted Miles, as Barney caught his hand and held it; "the—the ould spalpeen! the ——"

"Oh, be quiet, Miles!" commanded his distracted young master.

"Let me explain," he continued, turning to the Major. But the Major cut him short.

"The only explanation I'll listen to," he exclaimed, "is why you trespassed over my road, yesterday morning in your abominable car?"

"What's that got to do with the back and front door of this house?" demanded Barney.

"It's got nothing to do with them, but it has a great deal to do with you," retorted Major Hamilton; "also it will be the worse for you when the court knows that you threatened one of my servants because he tried to prevent you!"

"Not only did I threaten your servants, but I knocked one of them down, and I should have done the same to yourself if you had been there," Barney told him, with the most audacious effrontery.

"You knocked one of them down!" gasped the Major.

"I did," averred Barney. "His name was James, and is still, I suppose, excepting he's dead since, and he said he was your butler. I told him I was sorry, but that I was driven to do it."

"What drove you to assault my servant?" roared the Major.

"My car," replied Barney, coolly; "I drove it over your road, you know. Not that I drove there expressly for that purpose, Major Hamilton, or that I knocked James, your butler, in the snow just because he was your butler," continued Barney, a wild gleam of impish mischief in his grey eyes; "but because he was in my way, and wouldn't get out of it."

"Am I to understand, then," inquired the Major, with biting sarcasm, "that it's the habit in this benighted country, for so-called gentlemen—the sneer on the word made Barney wince—to go about spoiling other people's property, and assaulting their servants?"

"It is not," answered Barney, "but there are some people, Major Hamilton, who simply must be knocked down, as they won't listen to reason—such as you and your butler, James."

"My man was simply doing his duty, Mr. O'Hagan!"

"And I mine!"

"I'll have you put in prison!" thundered the Major.

"So much the better," Barney exclaimed, for he was by this time absolutely reckless; "I'll have peace from you, anyhow." So saying, he turned on his heel and went round to the front lawn, where a scene of dire confusion awaited him. All the guests were assembled, and most of them were staring into the dining-room windows, at the

brilliantly illuminated room, watching with despairing eyes the cat, the parrot and the terrier Mike, feasting on the delicate viands which had been prepared for themselves!

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Barney, aghast, "why don't they go inside?"—but Mr. Murphy, in a shaking voice, made the appalling truth known to him. The elderly aunt had closed every door, sealed every window, and, in a moment of forgetfulness, had banged the hall door as well, shutting every one out in the snow! All the carriages and other vehicles had been sent back, with instructions to call back at two o'clock *a.m.*, and it was now only seven *p.m.* Stranded in the snow, the thermometer almost at freezing point, seven miles from the only locksmith, with only a few old carts in the village, and many of the guests had come from the neighbouring hamlets around, what was the unhappy host to do?

"What about the lower windows?" asked Barney.

But the almost distracted Mr. Murphy told him that they were all heavily barred, back and front.

Then Barney had a brilliant idea. "My car isn't gone yet," he said suddenly, "let all your guests come to Lissaun and my father and I will entertain them!"

A ray of hope lit up the harrassed face of Mr. Murphy.

"Faith, that's a great idea of yours, Barney," exclaimed his father, delightedly. "Get every one to come at once!"

"But the Major's road," said Sadie, in despair; "He won't let Barney's car pass it, and the other way that you came here by is six miles longer! He has had a gate erected each end of his road, since yesterday."

Mr. O'Hagan's face fell. "The other road isn't safe, either," said he, "it's a wretched road; it was quite risky coming, but I dare not chance it with an overcrowded car."

Major Hamilton, who had just made his way round, and had overheard what was said, looked up: "When Mr. O'Hagan makes me a public apology for deliberately trespassing on my property, and for his impertinence just now," said he icily, "I shall allow his car to proceed over my road."

There was a blank silence, and then a murmur of anger, for Barney was a prime favourite with all. The young man flushed deeply, and pushed his hands into the pockets of his great motor coat, to prevent himself, as he afterwards told Nora, from knocking the Major down. But Denis, although rather jealous of Barney's popularity, took up arms in his defence.

"Really, Major Hamilton," he exclaimed heatedly, "the law will give you ample satisfaction, without annoying Mr. O'Hagan further!" For Denis had been present when the Major threatened Barney with the law. "Surely," he continued, "an apology is not necessary as well?"

"It is necessary," was the cold reply, "if he wishes to use my road."

"I think," whispered Mr. Murphy to his wife,

" that the only thing to be done is to make excuses to all and ask them to go home as best they can."

" We'll never be able to hold up our heads again ! " sobbed poor Mrs. Murphy. " After all the boasting we have had over this party, to have it end like this ! But, of course, we couldn't expect poor Barney to apologise before all these strangers to that brute of a Major ! Besides, he's done nothing at all to apologise for, as far as I can see ! "

Mr. Murphy went forward to speak to his guests, but Barney, who had heard what passed between his two friends, stopped him. " No," he said, quietly, " don't speak to them ; it's not necessary ; I'll do as Major Hamilton wishes " ; for Barney was kind-hearted and chivalrous, and felt keenly for his discomfited friends. But for all that, it required every scrap of courage which he possessed to make him go through the ordeal. He turned to the Major, his face quite white, and said, loud enough for all to hear : " I apologise, Major Hamilton."

The words were no sooner spoken than the Major wished them recalled ; for somehow, Barney's strained, white face had hurt him. But it was too late ; and with a muttered exclamation he moved away, and Barney, still very white, turned to his host.

" Now, Mr. Murphy," said he, briskly, " that car holds ten at a pinch. The ladies can all ride, and the men will enjoy a walk over the snow. I can spare them one of the lamps to light the way.

They can imagine they're the Waits, and singing Christmas carols will pass the time."

Barney's cheery good humour was irresistible, and with many jokes and gay laughter, all the ladies managed to pack themselves into the great car.

"Couldn't I dhrive the mothor, Master Barney?" asked Miles, who had lighted the lamps, and started the machinery, "you go wid the boys! You'd enjoy the walk."

The words were innocent enough; but Barney knew that all Miles wanted was to make hay with the Major's road.

"No," he answered curtly, "I'll drive!" Then he turned to the Major. "I shall bring back the car for you, Major Hamilton," he said, quietly, not a trace of resentment or anger in his voice. "Lissaun lies in the opposite direction to your house, and it would be a wretched walk for you, in the dark alone. Unfortunately I have only the two head-lamps." For Barney knew that the Major would not come to Lissaun with the rest.

"You needn't trouble to come back for me, Mr. O'Hagan," said the Major stiffly.

"It's no trouble!" returned Barney, quickly, though there was a pang of regret in his heart as he thought of Nora.

"I would prefer that you send your chauffeur back," was the ungracious reply, "or call at my house and send the carriage!"

Barney winced; but Miles, with flaming cheeks, suddenly spoke. "Sorra the bit av meself 'ill

come back for ye!" he cried, in furious tones; "Ye may skimander over the ice, or sink in all the bogs, or stand where ye are until mornin', bud it's not Miles O'Byrne that 'ill waste his time on such an uncivil ould Sasanach! I'm goin' wid the boys!" And before his astonished young master or the almost apoplectic Major could say a word, he had disappeared into the darkness.

"Good man, Miles!" muttered old Mr. O'Hagan. "I'll raise his wages, to-morrow," he added aside to Mr. Murphy, while Sadie whispered to her mother: "I'm glad Miles said that! It served Major Hamilton right! Poor Barney!"

But Barney climbed hastily into the motor, too dazed for speech, and the splendid car went speeding down the road, straight as an arrow, under his skilful hands. Soon the cheerful hum died away in the distance, and the merry voices of the Christmas Waits grew fainter and fainter, until the Major was left alone with only the gaunt trees, and white, silent snow for company. And presently the moon rose, and turned the black clouds of night to silver mountains, majestically beautiful; and the white snow glistened in the moonbeams, and that small piece of earth was like some celestial world, where angel hosts could dwell for ever.

But the Major gave no thought to all the beauty which surrounded him: he saw nothing only two grey eyes, laughing, quizzical, yet kind.

God knows what thoughts raced through his mind during that quiet vigil in the moonlight! God knows what floodgates of bitter, sweet memories

had been opened by the daring, questioning glance of those two grey eyes!

It seemed to the Major as if he had lived his life over again before he heard the throb of the approaching motor returning for him, and saw the bright lights coming swiftly towards him. His face was grey and haggard as he went forward. To his relief (although he admitted to himself that he was painfully inconsistent), he saw that Barney was driving. And very handsome and strong the young man looked, erect and alert, with both hands on the steering wheel.

Barney brought the car to a standstill beside the Major, and then sprang out. "I'm sorry," he exclaimed, cheerfully, "to have kept you so long, but some of the ladies were nervous, and I was obliged to drive slowly."

"I thought I told you to send my own carriage," growled the Major perversely; "why didn't you?"

Barney flushed. "I couldn't," he answered bluntly; "it would have been too cruel to get a man and horse upon a winter's night without necessity!"

As a matter of fact the Major had been thinking the same thing himself, but he had no intention of admitting it to Barney.

"Young man," said he, looking at Barney as if he were some rare specimen out of a museum, "you take a deal of impertinent liberties! Did your father ever thrash you?"

"He did not," replied Barney, "although he

often threatened he would. But he gave me 'down the banks,' all the way home to-night."

The Major stared.

"I mean," exclaimed Barney, "he abused me so much that I didn't know whether I was standing on my head or heels."

"For what?"

"For nothing," sighed Barney.

The Major climbed into the motor without another word, and Barney got in after him; and smoothly and softly the great car swung along the quiet, snow-covered roads, while the night wind whispered among the leafless trees overhead. That drive through the crisp, cold air, with Barney beside him, the lonely embittered soldier never forgot. He never forgot those moonlit roads, nor the cry of a seagull from the ocean, nor Barney's young, pleasant face.

Now and then he stole a furtive glance at the tall figure beside him, noticing the careless grace and perfect ease with which he managed the splendid car; noticing, too, how white and still his face showed in the moonlight.

At length Barney broke a long silence.

"Major Hamilton," said he, "I am going back to Dublin, the day after to-morrow, and—and—" speaking with an effort—"I want to ask you a favour."

"Go on," growled the Major, as Barney paused.

"It's about the road," he continued, stumbling over his words. "You see, through our unfortunate dispute, the people of Ballystack can scarcely get

their cattle and pigs to the market at all. Your road was a splendid, safe, short cut, right to the other side of the country. It's nearly impossible to get the cows across the boreens, and the pigs go threshing all over the bogs, up to every kind of obstinacy, instead of going to market."

"It's not my fault that the pigs are not under proper control," snapped the obstinate Major.

"But it's your fault that the pigs are not on the proper road," argued Barney.

"Whose fault is it that my motor was ruined?" demanded the Major, growing more angry, "thereby forcing me to close up the road."

"The fault of an Irish bog," replied Barney promptly.

"Irish bog, indeed!" scoffed the Major, "Irish er—er—ass!"

Barney understood that this delicate compliment was intended for him.

"But I didn't put the bog where it is!" he exclaimed, turning towards the Major in astonishment.

"No, you didn't put the bog there, but you put my car in the bog!"

"Good heavens!" cried Barney, "you don't mean that you have believed all along that I knew the cars would sink?"

"I certainly did believe it. I knew the sort of monkey tricks you're up to."

"But, Major Hamilton, you know the country much better than I, and I've only been here a few months!"

" 'Twould be better if you were only here a few weeks ! " returned the Major.

The young man, with a great effort, kept back a bitter retort, and remained silent, while the Major watched him furtively. " Major Hamilton," said Barney at last, " couldn't you give the people leave to use your road again ? It is not pleasant to feel that I have been the cause of trouble here."

" I'm only within my rights," maintained the Major, still stubborn ; " just as it's within my rights to have you summoned to-morrow."

" I know," said Barney, flushing again ; " you've got the whip hand ; all I can ask is that you'll be generous. Not that I care a button," he added contemptuously, " for the summons ; but it will worry my father, and I do care about that. And I care about the people, too."

" You should have thought about that before you trespassed," remarked the Major.

" I—I couldn't help trespassing that time," said Barney a little wearily ; " honestly, I'm very sorry about it, and—and for my impertinence. You are not very generous, Major Hamilton," he added, with a rueful smile, that was rather pathetic.

" I'm not," the Major admitted ; then his manner suddenly changed, and he put his hand on the young man's arm. That tired smile had gone home.

" Tell me why you trespassed," he asked gently, " It is from no idle curiosity that I ask."

" It was a sick call," said Barney, very quietly ;

"Fr. John went on his pony over the mountain, some quick way he knows of, but I was obliged to come by the road to tell him."

There was a moment's silence; then the Major spoke. "I'll get the notice taken off the road, to-morrow," he said.

"Oh, I say," exclaimed Barney, in delighted surprise, "you are good! Can't we be friends, now, sir?" he added, with an eager look.

Something clutched at the Major's heartstrings. "What about the summons?" he inquired gruffly.

"I had forgotten all about it," was the careless reply.

"And do you really want to be friends?"

"Why, of course!" returned Barney, with a frank smile. "I've been wishing for that all the time." He held out his right hand as he spoke, keeping his left on the steering wheel.

The Major caught the hand extended to him, and kept it in his own.

"I don't know why you should want to be friends with a sour, crabbed old curmudgeon like me," said he, "particularly when I've behaved so badly to you; but I will admit to you that loneliness and despair have made me what I am. My thoughts are always with a far-off, lonely grave in India, where my wife and baby boy lie side by side. No one knows, but the men of my own regiment. My boy would have been just your age if he had lived." The old soldier's voice broke.

Impulsively Barney pressed the Major's hand.

"I am sorry," he said simply, but so earnestly; "I'm very, very sorry, Major Hamilton!"

The Major bowed his head to hide his quivering lips.

"But, why despair?" asked Barney gently, "Only trust God, and He will help. 'Though thou shouldst slay me, still will I trust thee.'" he quoted softly.

"Why was I left and the two I loved taken?" groaned Major Hamilton. The words seemed wrung from him, but the grim barrier of reserve and pride were pulled down at last by Barney's kindly sympathy.

"God alone knows that," said Barney quietly; "perhaps to heal some bruised heart because you have suffered so much yourself, and can understand what anguish means. Perhaps because God wants you to be more like Himself; perhaps because He wishes that the joy of reunion hereafter will be more precious after the agony of parting and waiting here! But whatever the reason, it is good, because God knows best."

The young, reverent voice ceased, and the Major's head sank still lower.

Was Barney's word prophetical? for in the near future, when the first brown leaves of glowing autumn were fluttering to the ground, it was the loving kindness and true heart of the soldier which brought help and healing to a young, stricken soul.

The car sped onwards, and presently drew up at the great ivy-covered gateway. The Major

alighted, and then paused. Barney waited patiently, for he knew instinctively that his friend had something to say. At length the Major spoke, though with difficulty.

"Come to see me, sometimes, when you return to the village," said he; "to-night, after many weary years of pain, I have known a little comfort."

Barney put his hand on the Major's shoulder. "I would come in now," said he, his grey eyes very bright, "only I must return to my guests. But I shall come, to-morrow, if I may."

Major Hamilton gripped the kind hand which lay on his shoulder. "Come then," said he, "I shall be waiting for you, my boy!"

"Good night!" said Barney softly, and stooping forward, he kissed the old soldier's forehead. But Major Hamilton stood motionless, two scalding tears running down his bronzed cheeks, as he watched the car speeding away down the white road till it was lost to view. Then he leaned his tired head on the gate and sobbed; the great, tearless sobs of a strong man. But all the heart-hunger and bitterness of many lonely years melted away with those sobs, for Barney's kiss had brought healing and benediction!

The moon grew clouded, and soft feathery flakes of snow began to fall; but the quiet figure never stirred. There, in the peaceful, white world, with the stars glinting in the deep blue sky above, alone with the Creator of it all, the soldier's sorrowing storm-tossed soul found God's peace—at last!

CHAPTER X

A CHRISTMAS PARTY AT BALLYSTACK

ALL was brightness and good humour at Lissaun. Everyone tried to do everything at the same time, and failed, as a matter of course; but the confusion caused thereby only added to the general hilarity.

Mrs. Murphy, with the housekeeper's aid, made a successful raid upon the larder, and by clever contriving managed to supply ample provisions for the unexpected guests. Nora was her right hand, and flitted here and there, quietly busy. Whilst Mrs. Murphy was foraging, the girl mixed and baked a great batch of appetising, flaky griddle cakes; and finding some cold potatoes, added some savoury squares of potato cakes as well, serving all hot, with sweet, fresh butter.

Musha! but they were the grand cakes! Snowy white inside, and a delicate, golden brown on the outside, done to a nicety, and as light as a feather! And it wasn't long, I can tell you, before every one of those cakes was conspicuous by its absence, and all the guests, like Oliver Twist, "asking for more!" For Nora was the colleen who knew how to bake either on the griddle, or in the old-fashioned pot oven, with the fire on the hearth! Delicious cakes and bread

that would melt in your mouth, and would whet the appetite of the greatest epicure alive!

Meanwhile, the "boys" were not idle. Denis and Shaun attended as waiters, Patsy and Brian made very efficient butlers, while the rising young barrister from Dublin, Donal O'Grady, electrified everyone by helping to wash the delf and china!

Old Mr. O'Hagan, came out in an entirely new light, proving himself an adept in the subtle art of cutting sandwiches! Barney was completely astonished, as he had never seen his father do such a thing before.

Even Miles, who on ordinary occasions scorned to wash even a salt spoon, threw himself gallantly into the breach, and rolling up his gold-laced sleeves, out of harm's way, constituted himself scullion!

As for Barney—he was the life and soul of all the gaiety, and was here, there and everywhere apparently at the same time, helping everyone, and with a cheery word for all, servants and visitors. He was balancing himself on the edge of a table, trying to prize open the lid of a tin of preserved pears, with a rusty nail and a poker (the proper tin-opener having mysteriously disappeared, as such things invariably do if wanted), when a light step caused him to look up. Nora had come into the room, and was standing beside him. Barney welcomed her with a very loving smile. "Well, avourneen," said he, "and what's a trouble to you?"

"It's Thady," answered Nora, shyly. Somehow,

she was generally shy with this quizzical, debonair lover, who was always so merry, yet so gentle, and who could call the bright colour into her cheeks with one keen, kind glance from his grey eyes.

"What mischief is Thady up to now?" asked Barney.

"It's not mischief this time, it's—it's foolishness! He's been as good as gold, helpin' everywan, or thryin' to," Nora added, with rather a wistful smile.

"Where is he?" inquired Barney, still intent upon his work, having already stabbed himself twice with the nail, and almost flattened four of his fingers with the poker.

"He's below stairs in the back kitchen, an' he won't come up for the dance, though Mr. O'Hagan says that everywan is to come!"

"Of course," agreed Barney, "and why won't Thady come? He's a fine dancer."

"He is that, but he says he's afeard av you!" Poor Nora looked distressed, as Barney opened his eyes in astonishment.

"Afraid of me!" he echoed blankly; "why should he be afraid of me?"

"He's afeard av you iver since the day ye wint for him about the geese," explained Nora.

"Oh, I say, Nora, I'm sorry!" and Barney spoke in genuine regret. "But I'd no intention of bullying, you know, although I remember that I did 'go' for him! I never dreamt, however, that poor Thady would get afraid of me! Why,

you'll be getting afraid of me yourself next!" Barney spoke at random; but as Nora made no answer, he shot a sudden keen questioning look at her drooping face.

"Why, Nora," he exclaimed incredulously, "surely you are not afraid of me too?"

There was such a hurt ring in the young man's voice that Nora's lips quivered as she answered: "I think—I—I do be afeard av ye; just a little—sometimes."

Barney's lips took an ominous line; then he renewed his attack on the tin, without a word.

There was silence for a little while, but at length Nora ventured to put her hand on his shoulder: "Are ye angry with me?" she whispered timidly.

Barney raised his head and smiled into her frightened eyes. "No, alanna," he said gently, "I'm not angry with you, but I'm very angry with somebody else."

The girl's lips trembled more and more. "Is it Thady?" she asked.

"No, it's not Thady, though it's a man, right enough; guess again, Nora."

"Do I know him?"

"Well," said Barney slowly, as if considering the matter, "you do know him, but not very well, I think; not nearly so well as I should like you to know him."

Nora was nonplussed, and a little bewildered.

"Musha, who is it at all?" she exclaimed. "Tell me!"

"There's no time to tell you now," returned Barney, still smiling. "Some other time I'll tell you all about him, and between us we may manage to improve him. I hope so, at any rate. Just at present I've got to open this tin, and to make Thady dance."

"It would be the greatest pity if he didn't dance," said Nora very seriously, "for he's a powerful hand at the dancin', an' no mistake!"

Barney began to laugh suddenly at the girl's unconscious bull; then started a fresh assault upon the obdurate tin. "When I demolish, or ruin, or destroy, or even scatter to the four winds of Erin this murderous tin," said he, "I'll go to Thady."

Accordingly, a few minutes after, having accomplished his task to his own supreme satisfaction, but to the great detriment of the carpet, Barney descended to the back kitchen. There he found Thady reclining in an old armchair, and apparently in a state of collapse. Nora was standing beside him, vainly trying to rouse him out of his lethargy.

"Musha, get up out av that, an' come to the dance," the girl was saying rather impatiently—

"I'm afraid, me jewel! Master Barney ud desthroy me, for sure!"

"Is it Barney!" exclaimed Nora, indignantly, "why, he wouldn't hurt a fly!"

"Thrue for ye," agreed Thady, mournfully; "bud I'm not a fly, Nora, I'm an *amadan*!"

Just then he happened to look up, and caught sight of Barney standing in the doorway.

"Now I'm landed!" he exclaimed, and made a desperate attempt to hide himself in a great dresser. But Nora held him, so that he stood before Barney like a prisoner at the bar.

"I say, Thady," said Barney, putting his two hands on Thady's shoulders, and gazing straight into his face, "why aren't you in the drawing-room?"

But Thady would not even answer. He tried to shrink away from his interlocutor, and glanced imploringly at Nora, his eyes plainly asking her to help him.

A quick flash of pity sprang to Barney's heart, and was reflected in his face.

"Look at me, Thady," he said quietly, giving Thady a very gentle shake as he spoke.

There must have been something magnetic about Barney, for Thady looked up obediently, and Barney's keen, steady eyes caught and held his wavering glance.

"You're the best dancer in the village," Barney continued, "and I want our guests to see how beautiful our old Irish dances are. I wish particularly that Mr. O'Grady, who is from Dublin, you know, should see what a boy from Ballystack can do. None can beat you at a hornpipe, Thady." (Which was quite true.)

"Barrin' Nora, yer honour," Thady blurted out, for he was always loyal to her.

Barney's smile was very gentle.

"Off with you then," said he, releasing Thady; "I want the two of you to dance a specimen dance."

" I thought yer honour wanted a hornpipe ! " said the bewildered Thady.

" Oh, Thady ! " breathed Nora, softly.

Not a muscle of Barney's face moved.

" Right enough, Thady," said he, heartily. " Don't mind me ; Nora understands what I mean."

Thady, whose whole face had brightened, left the room with alacrity, Nora's hand in his. For Barney's kindly tact had not been at fault. It meant a great deal to poor Thady who was always in trouble because of his stupidity, to be counted the best in something, even though that something was only a country dance.

" Now for Miles," sighed Barney, for he had noticed that his chauffeur had kept away from him all the evening. He found Miles in the scullery, surrounded by stacks of plates and cups, and whistling with subtle defiance and in ear-splitting tones : " Go to the dickins and shake yourself." When he saw Barney he gave a violent start, and two of the plates came to grief.

" Don't break anything else, Miles," said Barney affably, picking up the fragments as he spoke, and slipping them into the chauffeur's pocket ; " the willow pattern is very expensive and exceedingly hard to match." Then as Miles regarded him in angry silence he continued gravely : " And whatever you do, don't break me, as I notice by your expression you would like to, because I'm an unique pattern and couldn't be matched for love or money."

"Sorra the matther if ye were smashed then," muttered the chauffeur, who was taking the bits of broken delf out of his pocket. "What the mischief d'ye want, puttin' thim wet chanies in me pocket? It's desthroyin' me mothor coat ye'll be, an' then what'll the masther say?"

"I won't be spoiling your pocket, Miles, though the pieces of delf may; but in any case my father would never know, as he is not in the habit of going about putting his hands in other people's pockets."

"This isn't the willow patthern at all!" exclaimed Miles, catching sight of the plain gold and white fragments.

"I know it's not! I only wanted to remind you that the willow pattern is expensive, as a warning to you to be careful, because our dinner service is the genuine willow pattern."

"Arrah, will ye get out av me road, Master Barney," exclaimed Miles in disgust, for he saw that his young master was in a particularly tantalising mood. "'Tis you that likes to be devartin' yerself at other people's expinse! Ye put the heart across me, comin' in all av a slap."

"Well, you can't expect me to ring a bell, or utter a war-whoop, or whistle like a steam engine," argued Barney, "as a warning when I'm coming."

"Ye're enough to dhrive anywan out av their seven sinses!" cried the goaded chauffeur.

"Then don't you worry, Miles," returned Barney, soothingly; "you haven't got one sense to lose, let alone seven."

Miles shut his teeth with a snap, and began washing the delf again, with most unnecessary vigour.

"At all events," resumed Barney, "I came to give you orders to drive me over to Coolcrannach to-morrow."

Miles grew red. "Dhrive yerself!" he muttered.

"I don't know how!" replied Barney, opening his eyes in surprise.

"Ye don't how how to dhrive a mothor car!" shouted Miles, losing his temper completely. "What a gom ye are!"

"Of course I can drive a motor car, but you said to drive myself," retorted the aggravating Barney, who thoroughly enjoyed taking a "rise" out of his unfortunate chauffeur, "and besides," he added, "what's the use in keeping a dog and barking yourself?"

A sullen look came into the chauffeur's face. "I'll not dhrive ye then," he answered deliberately.

"You'll drive the car, and I'll be in it. You must, it's my orders."

"I'll not take your ordhers," retorted Miles, doggedly; "I'll take the sack first."

"Well, you'll get it," responded Barney in resigned tones. "The last time you raised my dander, there was almost being wigs on the green; but there'll be murder in earnest if you annoy me again. Besides, if you leave me, Miles, it may be a case of 'out of the frying pan into the fire' with you."

"I'm not sarten that I'd be mindin' the fire, for

I'm used to the divil himself already! With you on wan side an' the masther on the other it's 'betune the divil an' the deep say,' I am!"

Barney flung back his head in a peal of ringing, musical laughter. "Which of us is the devil, Miles?" he cried.

"Without manin' any disrespect, it's yerself," was the instant rejoinder.

"It is very disrespectful to me to be compared with his Satanic Majesty!"

"Ye've got that be the wrong end av the stick," Miles informed him coolly; "I meant 'twas mighty disrespectful to the divil to compare him wid yourself."

"Miles!" admonished Barney, "if you keep on like this you'll come to grief literally, just as those plates did. And I warn you also to have the car round by ten o'clock sharp in the morning, for I won't put up with any nonsense." So saying, Barney sauntered to the door, but paused, with his hand on the knob, and looked back. Something in Miles' dejected expression made the young man feel remorseful, and he walked back again, and put both hands on his shoulders. All the mischief had died out of his face now.

"What's the trouble, Miles?" he asked kindly.

The chauffeur bit his lip. It was hard enough to bear Barney's wild, frolicsome moods, and maddening arguments; but Barney's gentleness was more unbearable still. Miles was powerless before it, and was quite silent.

"Well?" said Barney, quizzically.

Miles took the young man's hands from his shoulders, and held them tightly.

"I don't want to go next or near Coolcrannach," he exclaimed in a white heat, "because av the way that ould reptile av a Major spoke to yer honour, an'—an'—" he stopped suddenly; but Barney understood and, although he winced and flushed, answered without resentment.

"That's all right, Miles," he said quietly, "and in any case, I deserved what I got. But you mustn't call Major Hamilton a reptile, because he's my friend, and I wouldn't be friends with a reptile, not even a tortoise!"

"Friends!" echoed Miles, incredulously "with the Sasanach?"

"Certainly, and I'm going to spend to-morrow with him,"

For a moment Miles appeared stunned, then he rallied.

"Now ye're talkin'!" he exclaimed, rather blankly.

But before Barney could talk any more, Sadie raced into the scullery like a whirlwind.

"At last I've found you!" she gasped, quite breathless. "You're wanted in the drawing-room, to recite."

"Oh, I say!" groaned Barney; "I'm tired, and hoarse, and I've a headache, and—well—I'm about used up. I really can't go, Sadie."

"I told them you were tired," returned the girl, "but your father said that if you didn't come,

you'd be more tired by the time he was done with you, so I came to warn you."

"But I'm not a child," exclaimed Barney, with a sort of comical vexation, "to be coerced like this!"

"If you put the masther out, a vic," observed Miles, who spoke from experience, "there'll be the duce to pay."

"Oh, I'll go," returned Barney, a trifle ruefully, as he opened the door for Sadie. "You'll drive the car, to-morrow, Miles?" he added, interrogatively.

"With a heart an' a half!" was the quick response.

"Barney," said Sadie, as they went slowly upstairs together, "I mean to tell Miles to drive the big motor, so that you can drive the other small one, with only Nora and Katie and Jamesy O'Farrell. That will give you a little time with Nora." For both Sadie and Fr. O'Brien knew of the engagement.

"You're a brick!" exclaimed Barney, gratefully.

"I'm so sorry," continued the girl, "that we have given you all this trouble, just through Aunt Sophia's silly mistake, and——" but Barney stopped her peremptorily.

"It has been one of the best evenings I ever spent!" he assured her, quite genuinely; "and besides," he added quickly, as the remembrance of that moonlight drive flashed into his mind, "it has been a lucky accident to one person at least."

"To whom?"

"To Major Hamilton."

"Really?" exclaimed Sadie, delighted, but a little incredulous.

"Sure!" he returned, laughingly; "and it's worth a little extra trouble to make people happy, isn't it?"

Sadie nodded.

"And I've never seen my father enjoying himself so much before," Barney continued; "he's just powerful. But I wonder," he added reflectively, "if he will ever realise that I have a will of my own."

"He won't!" remarked Sadie promptly.

Barney stared at her, and then smiled.

"Why not?"

"Because you haven't a will, where he is concerned," was the unexpected answer.

The young man reddened, then laughed, though a trifle disconcerted.

"I plead guilty," said he.

"But, why?" asked the girl in surprise, and as Barney was silent, she continued: "I have often wondered about it. Is it that you were afraid of him when you were a child, and the habit clings? I can imagine Mr. O'Hagan being frightfully cross, but I can't imagine your being afraid of anyone, for all that," she added naively.

A very tender smile curved the young man's sensitive lips.

"I have never been afraid of my father," said he, quite simply, "and he has never punished me, or been strict with me in all my life."

"Then why are you so docile to his whims?"

persisted Sadie. "You take all his sharp, sarcastic speeches, and even reprimands, so beautifully, although I have often seen you wince. And now you are going to recite just to please him, though you are tired out."

"I'm going to recite, right enough," laughed Barney, "but I'm afraid I'm going rather slowly!"

"Well, I shouldn't go, if I were in your place!" declared the girl bluntly, "especially if he threatened me before everyone and sort of forced me! I just couldn't!"

"Oh, yes, you could," said Barney, very quietly, and looking down at her with a kind smile. "If you knew my father as I know him, Sadie, you would go to the ends of the earth at his bidding, just as I would."

"I should not!" reiterated Sadie doggedly; "I wouldn't be forced into doing anything!"

"That depends on what forces one."

"Well, your father forces you! It's absurd, considering you're a man!"

"Oh, no, he doesn't force me," said Barney, quietly. "My love for him forces me."

Sadie suddenly raised her head and gave him a long, wondering look.

"I hear the piano, now," said Barney, smiling at her bewilderment, "so I'll wait until it's finished, I mean until the music is finished. I want to tell you about my father, Sadie. Sit down here for a few minutes."

They were just passing a tiny alcove on a landing, with a lounge, a small table, and some rare palms.

The young man settled the cushions comfortably for Sadie and then sat down himself.

"You see," he began with a whimsical smile, "when I was a small boy, I was simply impossible. My mother died when I was only three years old, and my father was very often away, so I ran wild. Everyone was in despair over my wickedness, and often and often I deserved a thrashing, if ever a boy did. I was worse than Rory and Mike put together."

"That's impossible!" averred Sadie, very decidedly.

"I was, really," Barney maintained, "and I was as proud as Lucifer, into the bargain! And to crown all, an incorrigible tease. Unfortunately," he added, rather dolefully, "I haven't succeeded in overcoming those failings yet."

Sadie remembered the galling little incident with Major Hamilton, and Barney's humility, and thought otherwise.

"You're just perfect," she asserted, warmly. "None of your friends would like you a bit changed. I'm not surprised that Nora fell in love with you; she'd have no sense if she didn't!"

Barney laughed boyishly, quite unembarrassed, for he and Sadie were very real chums.

"Then why didn't you fall in love with me yourself, Sadie?" he asked, audaciously.

Sadie smiled frankly, but a little tender gleam shone in her blue eyes that Barney was quick enough to catch.

"I think there was someone before you,"

she told him, softly, "but go on about yourself, Barney."

"Everyone was always urging my father to whip me," he continued, "but he never did; and worse still, they used to implore him to send me to a boarding school, to tame me."

"But he didn't send you?"

"No; I went afterwards to college of my own choice, when I grew up, just to take my degrees. But I couldn't make you realise"—here a hard look came over his handsome face—"how bitter I felt over it all! I knew most of it was my own fault, but that didn't help matters. Everyone was against me, excepting Miles, dear fellow, and he always said a good word for me.

"One day, things reached a climax. Then my nurse sent me to the study, there to await in solitary confinement my father's return. I shall never forget the misery of those long hours! It was a bright June day, and down in the garden the blackbirds were whistling blithely, and the finches were calling to each other from the leafy trees. Everything seemed so joyous, excepting a child's passionate, breaking little heart."

"Poor Barney," said Sadie, pityingly.

"Every minute," he went on, "I was becoming more hardened, and sullen, and rebellious! A sort of helpless fury and resentment took possession of me, and fear, too, that my father might get really tired of me, and send me away from him.

"Towards evening I heard him drive up, and a little while after he came into the study. He still

carried his riding whip, and in his right hand he held a fragrant white narcissus. I noticed how harrassed and weary he looked, and I remembered that the flower was from my mother's grave in Glasnevin, where he had been that day. All at once I realised that although I did not give a rap for a whipping, I *did* care very much if my *father* whipped me. And I knew, too, that to be sent from home by him would be more than I could endure.

"My father came slowly over to where I sat crouched in the window seat, and stood still, looking at the flower. I slipped to my feet, and though I was quivering with nervous tension, I managed to say desperately: 'Are you going to send me to school?'

"'And what would I be doing, without you, Barney?' said my father, with a look of indescribable tenderness. All the rebellious anger in my heart broke down before that look and the kindly words; I just put my hands before my face, and cried bitterly. The next moment my father's arms were around me, and—and—" Barney's voice faltered—"those dear, protecting arms have been around me ever since."

There was silence for a little while, for Sadie's sympathetic appreciation of her companion's story was too deep for mere words. At length Barney stood up.

"Now you understand what my father is to me," he said, "and why his will is law."

"Yes, I understand," said the girl softly.

"Come," he exclaimed gaily, giving her his

arm, " the music has stopped. My father will be waiting for us."

Mr. O'Hagan *was* waiting, and his temper was not improved by the delay. The entertainment had not once flagged the whole evening, and Mr. O'Hagan, in his capacity of host, was anxious that it should continue cheerful to the end. Fr. O'Brien had been a great help, telling stories, both serious and comic, in his own inimitable manner, and playing accompaniments for those who could sing. For the priest was no mean musician. Even the reserved Mr. McKenna had been drawn out of his shell by the genial sagart, and had sung " The Boys of Wexford," with such vigour that everyone had applauded wildly, and Fr. John had clapped him on the shoulder, exclaiming delightedly, " Good man! A great Nationalist you are, and no mistake! More power to you! "

The song had just ended when Barney and Sadie came into the room.

" It's good of you to come, Barney! " remarked Mr. O'Hagan, ironically.

" Isn't it, right enough! " rejoined Barney, brightly.

His father glared. Above all things he hated his satirical speeches to be taken literally, as Barney always did, thereby robbing them of their sting.

" What do you mean by keeping me waiting? " he demanded.

" Amn't I worth waiting for? " Barney asked, with a merry look.

"I don't want any of your blarney," growled his father, "I want you to recite."

"And I *don't* want to recite! Why on earth are you always making me do things I hate?"

"It's good for you," chuckled his father, "it's discipline, a vic!"

"But I feel such an *ass* reciting!" pleaded Barney.

"As asses don't recite, your feelings are both unreasonable and absurd. Go and start the recitation at once! It will be time to stop before you begin."

"I wish it were time to stop," groaned Barney, feelingly, passing his hand over his aching forehead. But nevertheless, he went obediently across the room, with a comical glance at Sadie.

"Mr. O'Hagan," said the girl gently, "he's got a headache, and he's tired, and yet he came, utterly against his will, just because you wanted him."

"He took his time about coming."

"I kept him," said Sadie, quickly; "shall I tell you what we were speaking about?" and drawing Mr. O'Hagan into a secluded corner, with the echo of Barney's pleasant, cultured voice in their ears, she softly related what she had heard that night. Mr. O'Hagan's rugged face grew wonderfully tender as he listened.

"He's been the best son that ever any man had," he said, with deep feeling, as Sadie paused. "How he puts up with my—my tyranny, I don't know.

God bless him for it. I wonder now," he added reflectively, " why I'm such a crabbed ould chap? Barney has the cheeriest and sunniest temper in the world, and I never hear an angry word from his lips, though often I can see by his face that the battle is a hard one."

" I think," Sadie observed shrewdly, " that it's just because Barney is almost perfect! You are perfectly sure all the time that Barney will never go against you, so you get more tyrannical with him every day. I've got a very bad temper myself," she added frankly, " and I know that Barney would have that effect on me. I used to give him down the banks at rehearsals and he took it all so beautifully."

" Well, upon my word! " exclaimed Mr. O'Hagan, quite confounded at Sadie's candid criticisms; " but it's you that's got the audacity! Even Barney himself wouldn't dare speak like that to me! "

" I know he wouldn't," agreed Sadie calmly. " That's just what I'm pointing out. Not for want of courage, but because you're *you*. He's spoilt you completely."

" Your views are most refreshing," chuckled Mr. O'Hagan; " you reverse the old idea of parents spoiling their children, and say that the children spoil the parents! Up to the present, however, everyone has said that I spoilt Barney hopelessly."

" Oh, I know you have always given him his own way about things," assented the girl quickly;

" but then he's so lovable, and so reasonable that you can't just resist his coaxing! But for all that, you give him a pretty hard time of it."

Just then Barney finished his recitation, which was opportune, as Mr. O'Hagan was growing angry. He moved away from Sadie, but looked back and said gruffly: " Thank you, Miss Sadie, for what you have told me. It's worth more to me than diamonds."

The girl flushed with pleasure, and nodded gaily to him as he crossed to Barney's side. Barney was engaged in rather a bewildering conversation with an exceedingly deaf old lady, who informed him that she had greatly enjoyed his recitation, as comedy always appealed to her, especially if there was strong language in it. As Barney did not know that she was deaf, and as the recitation had been a tragic one, he was utterly confounded and a little mortified. However, he was too well bred to show his annoyance; so he agreed cordially with everything she said, observing that he thought the company of Sadie's parrot would about suit her, the bird being a mimic and a humorist, and having a vocabulary of surpassing strength and depravity. It's late owner, Barney went on to say, had been an able seaman, who ended a disreputable career in a convict prison. Whereupon the old lady smiled, and remarked that she always had an idea that he (Barney) was like that, too, and would probably end his career the same way. Luckily, Mr. O'Hagan came up at this moment and laid a caressing hand on his son's shoulder.

Barney (who was somewhat dazed) looked up at him.

"That was a grand recitation you gave us, Barney," said Mr. O'Hagan.

"You weren't listening to a word of it," said Barney, whose grey eyes were very keen.

"You're right there," returned his father, quite unabashed; "I was at it, hammer and tongs, with your friend, Sadie Murphy."

"With Sadie!" echoed Barney, in astonishment; "what on earth over?" Then suddenly his eyes grew mirthful and his lips broke into an irrepressible smile. Mr. O'Hagan looked offended, while Barney vainly tried to smother his laughter.

"I can just imagine how Sadie went for you!" he chuckled.

"Fr. John wants you to recite "Sheumas O'Brien,'" said Mr. O'Hagan.

"Well, I'm not going to recite it," was the decided answer.

"Oh, yes, you are," rejoined his father coolly, "and at once."

The young man bit his lip to keep back a quick exclamation of impatience; he felt as a restive young colt may be imagined to feel, when undergoing the humiliating process of being broken to the harness. Then he looked up at his father, and said gently: "I'm very tired, honestly, and I've a headache; please don't force me again, to-night."

"I'm not going to force you," replied Mr. O'Hagan

quietly; "I'm asking it as a favour. Won't you do it to please me."

Barney stood up instantly, his grey eyes shining, and the look which passed between father and son was beautiful to see.

"You know I'd do anything in the wide world for you," he said quickly, "I'm sorry for being so disagreeable."

"You're not disagreeable; you're a jewel, Barney."

Sadie had been watching this little scene, and guessed its sequel. As Barney came slowly into the centre of the room, she caught sight of Denis standing disconsolately at the other side of the room, and she smiled frankly across at him. The smile was so kind that Denis got courage to come over and stand beside her chair.

"Isn't Barney just splendid!" exclaimed Sadie; "he's so obliging and courteous!"

"He's powerful," answered Denis heartily. "It would be great to be like him!"

It was the last lucky straw which turned the balance of Denis's fortune. His generous defence and approval of his rival had done more to win Sadie's admiration, and make her realise how much she loved him, than anything else could possibly have done. For the girl's fine character thoroughly appreciated nobility in others. She was silent now, until Barney had finished reciting, and watched him as he stood chatting cheerfully to old Mrs. Brady, who was a decided crank, and was shunned, therefore, by everyone.

Just then Nora slipped into the room, and went over to Barney.

"Barney," she whispered, "I want ye to do something for me."

"Anything in the world, alana," he returned, with a smile of rare sweetness.

"But maybe you're too tired," faltered Nora, who noticed how white and weary he looked.

"I hope I shall never be too tired to do what *you* ask me," said he gently. "What is it you want, avourneen?"

"I want ye to sing."

Now Barney was really very tired and disinclined to sing, and his head was throbbing painfully; but not a trace of impatience or unwillingness was apparent in his manner. He just smiled down into Nora's upturned face.

"Of course I'll sing for you," said he; "what shall I sing?"

"Can you sing 'Annie, Dear'?" the girl asked shyly.

"Is that a favourite of yours, Nora?"

"It is, then,"

Barney immediately crossed to Fr. O'Brien, who still kept his place at the piano, and asked him to play the accompaniment.

"With the greatest of pleasure!" exclaimed the priest; "I didn't think we'd have such a treat, to-night."

He started the delicate little prelude of the lovely melody, and presently Barney's beautiful baritone rang through the great room, while all

listened in breathless silence. For those liquid notes, soft, appealing, yet vibrant with exquisite tenderness, reached every heart there and held it spellbound. Never before had the people of Ballystack heard so sweet a singer.

"The girl whom Barney honours with his love will be happy and blessed indeed," said Sadie, quietly, when the young man had ended his song.

Denis suddenly gripped the back of her chair.

"I suppose," he said slowly, "I'll be congratulating you, soon."

"For what?"

"Aren't you that lucky girl?"

"I'm looking for a lord," she replied, with a saucy smile.

Denis glanced down at her, and saw, with a catch at his heart, how fair she looked. She was robed in rich, dark blue velvet, with priceless Limerick lace at her white throat and wrists. The sunny brown hair rippled away from her young face, and was gathered in a loose coil low on her neck. A beautiful old gold Tara brooch was clasped in the soft lace.

"Besides," went on Sadie, gravely, "I don't know what Nora O'Mahony would say to my marrying Barney."

"Nora O'Mahony!" repeated the bewildered Denis; "what has she got to do with it?"

"She has got a great deal to do with it; she and he are engaged."

Denis was silent, the quick heart-beats almost choking him.

"I've found him," remarked Sadie quite casually.

"Whom? The lord?"

She nodded, and Denis stared at her like one in a dream.

"A lord!" he repeated vaguely; and then added quickly, "is he here?"

"He is here," she assented, "and he's very near to us now."

Denis gazed round wildly, and Sadie began to laugh, but her laugh was tremulous, though mirthful.

"Lords don't go about with a placard to that effect," she exclaimed; "can't you guess who it is, a chara?"

Suddenly a bewildering thought flashed into Denis' mind, leaving him almost giddy. He turned towards her abruptly, a little of his faithful heart's great longing reflected in his eyes. Sadie raised her head, and something in her face, something wonderful, tender, holy, made him understand at last.

"Sadie!" he said brokenly; "oh, a stoirin!"

"Silly old Denis," said Sadie, laying her soft cheek caressingly against the hand which held the back of her chair; "Of course it's you. It has always been you, only—I didn't realise it."

"But—but—I'm not a lord, Sadie!"

"You're lord of my heart, anyway," returned the girl, with an assuming smile.

He caught her hand, and held it, his heart full of passionate gratitude and joy.

"Oh, Denis,' she exclaimed, looking up at

him, and speaking with intense earnestness, "you don't know how much I missed you when I was up in Dublin this autumn! My sister was a perfect darling, and Donal was just splendid, and they gave me a glorious time, sight-seeing, and visiting such nice people. He took us to the Oireachtas every day, the week it lasted; and we went to the Theatre twice or three times, to hear the operas, and we saw the best cinema shows, too. Then one beautiful day Donal rowed us from Howth over to Ireland's Eye, where we had a picnic tea, and I sketched the picturesque old ruins there. It was such fun! And another time we all climbed Bray Head and watched the sunset over the great, wonderful Bay of Dublin!"

"That must have been a glorious sight, Sadie."

"It was just perfect," said the girl softly. "And another day," she continued eagerly, "Donal took a jaunting car to the Waterfall and we saw the Scalp, and the lovely little village of Enniskerry. We had tea that evening near the Dargle. But, Denis ——" and here the fresh young voice quivered, and the fair head drooped until it rested contentedly once more on his hand—"all the time, although I was so happy, I wanted the country, and—and—you, avourneen!"

* * * * * *

What will the New Year bring to all these happy-hearted young people? Joy or sorrow, laughter or tears, sunshine or shadow? As Thady O'Reilly would say, "there's a powerful lot more to tell yet!" And sure enough, it's only beginning I

am, now when I'm ending. But I shall wait until the Joy Bells have rung in the New Year for all before I tell you any more about Barney, and Nora, and Denis, and their friends, the Murphys of Ballystack.

CHAPTER XI

A VISIT TO COOLCRANNACH

ON the following morning, Barney O'Hagan came down to breakfast with an air of portentious gloom. This was so unusual that his father immediately inquired if he were ill.

Barney heaved a profound sigh, and poured out a cup of tea.

"Oh, I'm all right!" said he; "it's my conscience that's troubling me."

"Faith! it's not often you're troubled with the like!" retorted Mr. O'Hagan, dryly; "the change will do you good!"

"But it's so unpleasant!" objected Barney.

"What have you been doing?"

"Well, I'm going to visit Major Hamilton, to-day, an —"

"You're going to visit *whom*?" demanded Mr. O'Hagan.

"Major Hamilton."

Mr. O'Hagan appeared utterly confounded, but at last he spoke.

"You are going to do no such thing!" he thundered. "Not if I know it!"

Barney, although he shrank from these skirmishes with his father, was quite ready for argument.

"But you do know it," he retorted.

"If you were under age," went on Mr. O'Hagan, "I would forbid you to go! As it is, I ask you as a favour not to go."

Barney was distressed.

"But I promised to go," he explained.

"Oh! In that case, there's no more to be said!" snapped his father. "Some toast, please!"

The meal passed in complete silence, Mr. O'Hagan stubbornly ignoring Barney's repeated attempts at conversation. But after breakfast, when he went to the window to read the paper, a hand, whose touch he knew and loved, was laid lightly on his shoulder.

"I'm sorry," said Barney gently, "I didn't intend to annoy you."

Mr. O'Hagan's face softened, and he put down the paper.

"Barney," said he, "surely you can't really want to visit Major Hamilton, after the ructions he kicked up last night, thereby giving you a racking headache.

The hot colour burned in Barney's face, but his honest eyes never wavered.

"It was my own temper that gave me the headache," said he, "and I deserved all I got."

"Have you no spirit, Barney?" exclaimed his father angrily.

Barney's handsome lips took a curious straight line, and the colour ebbed from his cheeks. He was about to take his hand from his father's shoulder, but Mr. O'Hagan caught it, and so held him a prisoner. Their eyes met. After that look

Mr. O'Hagan decided that his son lacked neither spirit nor determination.

"I shall be late," said Barney.

"Did you appoint any particular time for your visit?"

"No; I only said I would go early."

"You'll go when you have answered my question, no sooner," rejoined Mr. O'Hagan, coolly. "Shut the door; I want to speak to you."

Barney silently did as he was desired; then came back, and sat down opposite his father. His face looked rather strained.

"What sort of a spirit have you got?" repeated Mr. O'Hagan.

Now Barney was Irish, and underneath all his gay insouciance the intense religious fervour of the Celt lay deep and strong. But like all earnest natures he shrank from speaking about his feelings. He was silent, therefore, while his father gazed at him with clear, unflinching eyes, observing closely every detail of the handsome high-bred face. The broad, noble brow, the firm, sweet mouth, the grey eyes, quizzical, yet kindly. But Mr. O'Hagan's steadfast gaze saw something else; something indefinable; elusive, indescribable, yet as evident, as arresting, as it was utterly unconscious! With all Barney's spontaneous friendliness and cheery sociability, there blended a subtle air of delicate fastidiousness; of exquisite dignity and gracious aloofness which had something royal about it.

"Well," said Barney, returning his father's gaze

with merry, dancing eyes, "will you give me the benefit of your thoughts?"

"Certainly not!" returned Mr. O'Hagan, "and they wouldn't be a benefit to you, in any case."

"You know," remarked Barney feelingly, "it's very disconcerting to be put under a microscope and taken to pieces and then to be left in ignorance of the result of the investigation! It makes me feel like a specimen worm of doubtful genus, about to be dissected. The sensation is simply frightful and demoralising."

"Well," replied his father, unsympathetically, "one conclusion I've come to is that you've got a confoundedly obstinate spirit."

Barney suddenly raised his head with a quick, nervous gesture, as if making a firm resolve.

"I suppose I have got an obstinate spirit," he said quietly; "but—but—I am trying—honestly to have—a Christian spirit."

If a mine had exploded at Mr. O'Hagan's feet he would not have been more astonished. The idea of happy-hearted, sunny-tempered Barney thinking about such things took his breath. It never struck him that Barney had a sunny temper because he thought of such things, and that therein lay the secret of his happiness. He sat quite still, staring out at the wide expanse of untrodden snow; but a tumult of conflicting thoughts was racing through his brain. At last Barney could endure the silence no longer; his nerves were all tingling.

"I know," he began, stumbling over his words,

" that you must think me an awful prig! I—I didn't want to speak about such things; but you force me to, although you see well I just—hate to!"

His father suddenly smiled.

" It's discipline, a vic," he said, teasingly; " you ought to be grateful to me."

Barney winced; keenly sensitive, he felt now that his father was laughing at him; but in this he was wrong. Mr. O'Hagan crossed to his side, and put one hand lovingly on his shoulder. " I don't think you could be a prig, even if you tried," he said quietly.

Barney heaved a sigh of relief. It was good to be understood.

" I'm such an easy person to get along with," continued Mr. O'Hagan, ironically, " that I don't wonder you've succeeded in your endeavours."

" But I haven't succeeded," said Barney; " that's the trouble."

" I'm not obliged to agree with you," observed his father, rather dryly; for he was thinking of Barney's unfailing good humour under his many bitterly sarcastic speeches and sharp reprimands, of his eager charity and kindness to all.

" Barney!" asked Mr. O'Hagan, " do you like Major Hamilton?"

" Yes!" was the unhesitating reply; " and I'm sure I should like him more if I knew him better. Besides, he's lonely, and he wants me to visit him. He has no friends here, only Fr. O'Brien."

" It's his own fault that he hasn't friends!" exclaimed Mr. O'Hagan. " Who in their senses

would want to be friends with such an old curmudgeon ? "

" I do ! " replied Barney promptly.

" I was speaking about people in their proper senses," observed Mr. O'Hagan, pointedly. " Are you going to be another Don Quixote ? "

" I might be worse."

" Do you realise," went on Mr. O'Hagan, " that if you visit Major Hamilton you will be obliged to invite him here ? "

Barney flushed.

" I had thought of that."

" I shall not see him if he comes here," said Mr. O'Hagan, coldly. " He refused our invitation last night."

" Not even if I ask you, as a favour, to receive him ? " Barney said, with a pleading look, and a pleading hand laid on his father's.

" No ; but this house is yours as well as mine : you may invite whom you choose."

" As if I would invite anyone whom you did not want," said Barney, looking straight into his father's eyes.

With an impatient ejaculation Mr. O'Hagan began pacing up and down the room. He knew that he was both ungenerous and unreasonable, but was too obstinate to admit it.

" There's Miles with the motor," exclaimed Barney, getting up, " I must go."

There was not the least shadow of resentment in his pleasant young face and cheery voice, although his father's refusal had hurt him sorely.

"Are you likely to be back soon?" inquired Mr. O'Hagan abruptly.

"I rather think not," Barney said, with a whimsical smile. "I'm sorry," he added quickly, "if you want me."

"I always want you, a vic," said his father, with sudden gentleness, "but I mustn't monopolise your company."

Barney's smile was very bright as he ran down the stairs, but he became more sober as he donned his coat and cap in the hall. At the bottom of the steps he paused, hesitated, and then turned and ran up the steps again.

"Are ye comin' at all?" called out Miles, who was standing beside the motor holding the door open.

"Presently."

"Musha!" exclaimed the chauffeur, banging the door in disgust, "'tis devartin' yourself ye are, at my expinse!" But his remonstrances fell on unheeding ears, for Barney had run into the hall and up the stairs again. Mr. O'Hagan was exceedingly surprised to see him enter the room.

"What's wrong with you now?" he inquired.

Barney went quickly across the room, and put both hands on his father's shoulders. His eyes were very eloquent, and Mr. O'Hagan understood their appeal.

"Do you really want me to invite Major Hamilton?" he asked, rather curiously, glancing up into the flushed, eager young face.

"More than I can possibly say," returned Barney.

"I shall be more grateful to you, if you do, than you could imagine."

"And why should you be grateful? In your heart you must think me an unreasonable old fool for going against you!"

"I am thinking no such thing," said Barney very gently, "and you know I'm not. Whether you are unreasonable or not wouldn't make my gratitude to you less if you do something you don't like doing just to please me."

Mr. O'Hagan suddenly took Barney's hands off his shoulders and sat down. Then he began reading the paper assiduously upside down. Barney, utterly at a loss, stood silently beside him.

"You'll be late for your visit," chuckled Mr. O'Hagan, who was enjoying his son's discomfiture. Then as Barney winced, he relented and added: "And you may tell Major Hamilton that I shall be—er—pleased to see him at dinner to-morrow. But if you can get round that old tyrant, Barney, and make him sociable, I'm a Dutchman."

It was a very happy-hearted young man that ran down the stairs again, and out into the crisp, exhilarating air.

"Faith!" remarked Miles, as he caught sight of Barney's radiant face, "if ye weren't a teetotaller, I'd be thinkin' 'tis the dhrink that's on ye! You're lookin' powerful hilarious!"

"Isn't this glorious morning enough to make anyone hilarious?" asked Barney gaily.

The chauffeur gave him a shrewd look as the little car slipped away down the drive.

"It isn't only the mornin' that has ye in such spirits," he observed.

Barney laughed.

"You're right there," he agreed. "But, I say, Miles! Every yard that brings me nearer my destination makes me less inclined to hilarity."

"I thought ye wanted to go!"

"I do, of course; but you must remember that I knocked Major Hamilton's butler in the snow, and that I shall be obliged to meet him now! It's extraordinarily awkward!"

Miles groaned.

"An' I gave the ould rapscallion—I mane" (as he caught Barney's eye) "the ould gintleman himself—all soorts, an' I'll have to meet him!"

Master and man gazed at each other in dismay.

"We're a nice pair to be going visiting any respectable house!" remarked Barney at last.

"We are that!" agreed the chauffeur; "bud all I can say is that wherever yourself is, wid your contrairy ways and impident tongue, there'll be the divil to pay! Since the first misfortunate minute I laid eyes on ye, an' you no bigger nor a shillaly, ye've been a heartscald to me!"

"Well," retorted Barney unsympathetically, "if I am contrary, you spoilt me more than anyone, yourself—and do still," he added, half under his breath.

Miles gave a secret, adoring glance at the comely face and figure beside him, but he spoke with apparent indignation.

"Musha!" he exclaimed, "bud it's the cowardly thing to remind a man av all his miny mistakes!"

"And," continued Barney unheedingly, "I gave you notice to go, and you wouldn't take it. So it's your own fault."

Miles disdained to reply, and the remainder of the journey was passed in complete silence. Soon the car swept up the splendid drive, and came to a stand before the great door. Miles descended, and rang in a leisurely manner

"An' whin am I to come back for ye?" he asked.

"I haven't got the remotest idea," was the vague reply.

The chauffeur became extremely indignant.

"Arrah, man alive!" he exclaimed, "is it a fool ye're thryin' to make av me?" But before Barney could enlighten him on this point, the absurdity of their position suddenly flashed upon Miles, for he knew that both of them would have been exceedingly glad if they were at home again. Miles was seized with an uncontrollable fit of laughter, which gradually increased in strength until he was positively shrieking. Upon which Barney's ever-ready risibility was infected, and he, too, gave way to helpless mirth.

Thus it happened that when the solemn-faced butler opened the door, he saw Miles leaning against one of the stone pillars, apparently drunk, and Barney in the car, also overcome.

The servant was stupefied; and Miles, raising his head, caught a glimpse of his face. His ex-

pression was so full of dismay that the chauffeur was thrown into fresh convulsions of merriment.

James retreated into the hall, and knocking at his master's door, went in. "I beg your pardon, sir," said he, "but the—er—gentleman has come."

"Then why don't you show him in?" demanded the Major.

"Well, you see, sir," the chauffeur is leaning up against the door, very drunk I'm afraid, and—er—Mr. O'Hagan seems almost insensible."

"What!" shouted the Major, springing up and striding over to the window. The butler's story appeared correct; for Barney was leaning back in the car, his head buried in the cushions, and his broad shoulders heaving. The Major's face became blank; but just then Barney roused himself, and staggered out of the car into the hall.

"You ass!" he exclaimed indignantly, "you've disgraced me! What will Major Hamilton think of me at all?"

"An' me bould James!" gurgled the chauffeur, "sure, 'tis frightened he was, an' away wid him, helther-skelther, to tell the Major, I'll go bail! I'm thinkin' we'd betther be gettin' back home at wanst."

Just then James returned to the hall, and Barney and he came face to face. The young man grew scarlet, but James, quite unmoved, went forward.

"Allow me," he said, deferentially, as he removed the visitor's heavy motor coat.

"Is the Major in?" asked Barney.

"Major Hamilton expected you, sir," replied

the butler frigidly. His tone expressed resentment and contempt for what he considered an inane and unnecessary question.

"Quite so," said Barney affably, "and that's the reason I thought he would be out."

As he spoke he drew off his thick motor gauntlets, and stuffed them into the butler's pocket.

"They'll be safe there," said he, smiling agreeably.

With the imperturbable impassiveness which characterises the trained servant, James threw the coat over his arm, and opening the study door announced "Mr. O'Hagan."

The Major turned quickly from the window, and went eagerly forward to meet the welcome guest. James saw a light in his master's eyes which had never been there before. Then Barney felt his hands taken in a long warm clasp. His young face was wonderfully pleasant as he looked at his host with a frank smile.

"I'm not too soon, then?" said he quizzically.

"What do you think?" returned the Major, drawing him towards a capacious armchair.

Barney sat down, well content with his reception.

"My father and I want you to dine with us, to-morrow," said he, at once, "if you have no other engagement."

"I never visit," returned the Major, somewhat stiffly. "I am not a sociable person. But I am much obliged to you both."

"I know you are not a sociable person," said Barney, "but you've just got to be, if you have anything to do with me."

"You seem to forget," observed the other, dryly, "that I always get my own way."

Barney gave him a droll look.

"I don't forget; I remember a little too well. But don't you think you might return my visit?"

"Oh, if you put it that way, of course I shall go!" returned Major Hamilton haughtily. "But, I thought your visit here, to-day, was free; if I had thought otherwise, I should not —" he paused, for he could not bring himself to utter the discourteous words to his guest. But Barney finished his speech for him.

"You would not have invited me at all, I suppose," said he, quietly. "Is that it?"

The Mayor's irascible temper got the better of his courtesy.

"Yes," he snapped, "that's it; I should not!"

The situation was decidedly strained; and anyone else would have said a polite "good morning!" and gone home. But that was not Barney's way. He had made a resolve to get under the Major's reserve and crustiness, and find and comfort the sore, lonely heart, of which he had caught a brief pitiful glimpse. So, although he felt his host's rudeness keenly, there was no resentment in his voice when he spoke.

"My visit *is* a free one," he said, gently, "and I have never felt more honoured than when I got your invitation." So saying, he crossed over to his host, and carefully balanced himself on the arm of the great chair.

"I'm sorry," he said quietly, "if I have given you a wrong impression."

But Major Hamilton only stared moodily into the blazing fire. At length Barney ventured to put his hand softly on his shoulder. The Major remained motionless, but how the touch thrilled him!

"You see," said Barney gently, "I think it would help you if you were to endeavour to break down this barrier between the world and yourself, if you would only become interested in people and things."

The Major was simply taken by storm! He was amazed that Barney had had the courage to attack his bulwarks of reserve in such a fearless manner! But he would not surrender without a struggle.

"I don't want the world, nor people!" he returned, in a hard voice.

"You want me!" said Barney audaciously.

"Yes," said the Major slowly, while his bronzed cheeks reddened; "I want—you; but I don't want help!"

"But I *want* to help you!" persisted Barney, nothing daunted. "Could you not try my way, even for a little while; just to show me you have forgiven me, sir?"

There was such genuine kindliness in Barney's manner and pleasant voice that the Major found, to his own amazement, that he was relenting. But Barney's exquisite courtesy had made him feel bitterly ashamed of what he had said, for the Major was a thorough gentleman.

"I should like," he said presently, but speaking with difficulty, "to ask a favour of you; but after my ungracious speech just now, I—well, I don't feel justified in asking you."

"There is nothing you need mind asking me!" Barney answered, with a quick smile and flush of pleasure; "you know I am only too glad to do anything for you."

"Well, then," said the Major, looking up into his eager face; "I'll go to dinner to-morrow, on one condition."

"Granted!" returned Barney instantly.

"How can you know that, until you have heard the condition?" demanded the Major irritably.

"I mean to accept the condition, whatever it is. I take it, you are a reasonable person, who will not ask anything unreasonable."

"You know perfectly well that I'm a most unreasonable person!" snapped the Major. "You have had proof of it, to your cost."

Barney smiled, although the colour deepened in his cheeks.

"I'm not afraid to risk it, anyhow," he averred, contentedly; "what do you ask of me, Major Hamilton?"

"That you will remain and dine here to-night," returned the Major with an eagerness he tried in vain to hide.

Barney was profoundly touched.

"Why, of course I'll stay," he said. "That's a very easy condition!"

"You'll find the condition harder as the day goes on," his host informed him, gruffly.

Barney jumped up with a merry laugh.

"There are two sides to most things," he exclaimed. "Now I must tell Miles to let my father know you will come."

He was leaving the room when the Major said abruptly: "Mr. O'Hagan! Will you—forget—what I said—I—" but Barney would not let him proceed.

"Surely I'll forget," he said gently; "and with a sunny smile, ran into the hall. Major Hamilton noticed wistfully how pleasantly the gay laugh and cheery young voice and buoyant footsteps echoed through the grey old house.

The Major often wondered how that magic day passed! He only knew that his merry young visitor simply bewitched him. For Barney gaily tyrannised over his host in his usual masterful, daring manner; charming the other's crustiness away by sheer kindliness; brushing aside every sarcastic or impatient speech with indomitable good humour; getting the Major to do exactly as he didn't want to do, but as he, Barney, wished him to do, and breaking down every barrier of reserve by his own rare winsomeness. And all this was done with a complete lack of self-consciousness. He dragged his host for a walk over the snow, a thing that gentleman loathed; and after luncheon, he insisted on the Major playing billiards.

"But look here!" exclaimed the goaded Major, "I haven't played billiards for over ten years!

The idea is nonsensical! I forget how to hold the cue!"

"It's time you learnt again, then," was all Barney said; and forthwith he got out the cues and balls and marking tablet.

"This is a first-rate table," remarked Barney, judicially; "but we must have some one to mark. I'll ring for James"; and to his host's utter astonishment, he immediately rang. The butler, thinking that his master had rung for afternoon tea, as it was almost four o'clock, came up with the tray, on which was placed the silver cake plates, cream jug, and sugar bowl. Fortunately, he had not brought the crown Derby cups and saucers; for just as he opened the door, Barney made a dash after one of the balls, which had eluded him. He and the butler collided, and the result was chaotic.

"I say!" exclaimed Barney, contritely, as he picked himself up, "I'm exceedingly sorry! But I had no idea you were coming in!"

The butler made no answer, only sat on the floor looking completely dazed, and Major Hamilton surveyed the delinquents with severe disapproval.

"This is most extraordinary conduct!" he remarked, icily.

"It is, sir," agreed Barney, cheerfully; "but I say, James," he added, "I think you ought to get up and sit on a chair, if you wish to rest. If you stay there, someone will fall over you, which will add to the melee; besides, it's rather eccentric to sit on the floor, isn't it?"

The butler, without a word, slowly stood up, and Barney collected the different articles and the pieces of cake, and handed them to him.

"I'm afraid," remarked Barney, making frantic efforts not to laugh, "that you think I knocked you down on purpose!"

"I'm sure of it, sir," answered the butler deliberately.

"Be reasonable!" said Barney. "How could I possibly know that you were coming in? It was an accident, honestly—*this time*!" Sheer mischief prompted Barney to add those last two words, and James resented them accordingly. Their eyes met, and to add insult to injury, Barney suddenly broke into uncontrollable laughter, while the butler regarded him with a stony glare.

"I—beg—your—pardon!" Barney gasped, "but —you looked—so odd—sitting among the ruins—of —cake—and silver!"

Without a word, the butler stalked out, carrying the wrecked tea equipage; but he presently returned with a cloth and carefully wiped the carpet where the milk had spilt. By that time Barney had recovered himself.

"Don't go, James," said he. "We want you to mark our score for us."

The Major felt as if he were being slowly forced to his knees, but he made one more desperate rally.

"I haven't said I would play," he said, coldly.

"Of course not! Why should you?" answered Barney; "Deeds, not words, is the best motto,

Major. Come on now! I'll back Ireland against England, any day!"

The Major was beaten, and he knew it, and before his own servant. He surrendered gracefully, therefore, and began to play, and the odd part of it was that he actually took an interest in the game, with Barney as an opponent, just as he had enjoyed the tramp over the snow with the same irresistible Barney for a companion.

In the middle of the second game, the Major was summoned to his study to see his agent on some important business; during his brief absence Barney determined to say something to James, which he felt was his duty to say, yet which his proud spirit shrank keenly from saying. He laid down the cue which he was chalking, and crossing over to the butler put a light hand on his shoulder. James was electrified, and looked up at Barney in astonishment. In all his forty years as a servant, none of his superiors had ever treated him with such frank familiarity before.

"I want to explain," said Barney, flushing, however, as he spoke, "about—the other day, when—I threw you into the snow. You see," he went on desperately, as James maintained a stony silence, "I just had to fetch Fr. O'Brien anyhow! There was a poor, dying woman calling in agony for the priest, and I knew the only hope of his coming in time was my getting over that road with the motor."

"I was only doing my duty, sir," observed the butler stiffly.

"I know that," said Barney gently, "and I felt I was doing mine, though I admit," he added, whimsically, "that I did it in rather an arbitrary manner. But won't you forgive me, like a good fellow, and shake hands?"

It was very few who ever resisted Barney's frank smile and outstretched hand, and the butler was not one of them. But his love of fair play constrained him to tell what was in his mind.

"It wouldn't be playing the game, sir," he observed, "if I took your hand, considering I intend summonsing you for assault and battery."

Barney's joyous laugh rang through the room.

"Why, that won't make any difference!" he exclaimed merrily.

James was confounded: undoubtedly this Irishman was the most extraordinary person he had ever met. He hesitated, and then placed his hand in Barney's. He would have withdrawn it hurriedly, but the young man held it fast.

"Was—was the priest in time, sir?" the butler asked rather awkwardly.

"Yes," said Barney, softly; "only just in time! The poor woman died so happy, thanking God that He had sent His minister to help her."

"I—I think, sir," stammered James, "that—I shall not trouble the—er—magistrate for that summons!"

"You're a good man," said Barney; but just then the Major returned, and they finished the interrupted game. After tea, which James brought in again at about five, Barney persuaded his host

to speak about India, and his life there; and he discovered that the Major was an exceedingly literary man, and a deep thinker.

James, on his way to the pantry, was electrified to hear the sound of gay voices, and then a laugh in his master's tones! Yes! Actually a laugh!

"Oh, that Irishman!" soliloquised James; and his face softened at the thought of the young man's kindness to his lonely, friendless master.

There was a fine picture gallery at Coolcrannach, that Barney wished to see. It was almost dusk by the time he had finished his tour of inspection; and as he and the Major were coming down a long corridor, the Major paused outside a closed door.

"This was my wife's boudoir," said he quietly. "There is a portrait of her by a first-rate artist. I want you to see it."

He opened the door, and they went in. It was a small, beautifully furnished room, with rare Indian bric-a-brac and rugs and cushions. At one end stood a splendid piano.

"That is the portrait," said the Major, pointing to a magnificent oil-painting over the mantelpiece.

Silently, with all his wild spirits sobered, Barney looked up at the picture. It was a lovely face he saw there; gentle and high-bred, with soft brown eyes and smiling lips and rippling, golden hair.

A great wave of pity flooded his young heart as he thought of the profound loneliness of the bereaved husband. Impulsively he turned to him, but Major Hamilton's eyes were fixed with unutter-

able longing on his dead wife's pictured face. His eyes fell on the piano. Quietly he crossed the room, and, opening the instrument, struck a few soft chords. The Major started, and made a step forward as if to bid him stop. But as he looked at the young, erect figure, and the golden head gleaming in the gathering twilight, his face changed, and he remained motionless.

And then softly, sweetly, like an echo of celestial harmony, rose and swelled the opening chords of that most beautiful of all hymns, "Lead, kindly Light." And soon Barney's rich baritone rang through the room :—

"Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom,
Lead Thou me on.
The night is dark, and I am far from home,
Lead Thou me on.
Guide Thou my feet, I do not ask to see
The distant scene, one step enough for me!"

With a sudden strangled sob the Major sat down. The last time he had heard that hymn was in the same room, when his idolised wife had sung it to him the night before they sailed for India; just one short month before she died!

He remained motionless while Barney sang; and then the young man started that other fine hymn, so full of faith and trust: "Nearer, my God, to Thee."

"Nearer, my God, to Thee, nearer to Thee,
What tho' it be a cross that raiseth me."

The singer rose and came over to the bent figure in the chair. "I wish from my soul, Major Hamilton," said Barney, with infinite gentleness, "that you could only understand what faith and trust really mean! It would make hard things so much easier to bear, it would help you to endure all this loneliness and separation and pain! To endure with a brave heart, and a brave smile, and a brave hope—an unfailing hope of something better yet to come! If you would only try to face life as it is, to take up again the broken cord, just where you laid it down! I know that you will find some silver threads running through the grey warp and woof, although the two golden threads have been severed!"

Something clutched at the Major's heartstrings. It was such a long, long time since any one had cared whether he suffered; not since his girl wife had been laid in her Indian grave. And now, with free, spontaneous charity this young Samaritan was pouring into his hidden, torturing wounds the wine and oil of sympathy and help!

The Major raised his haggard face, and looked up into Barney's pitying grey eyes, marvelling at the intense faith and strength in their clear depths.

"If one could forget!" he whispered. "Oh, God! If one could only forget!" It was a cry of despair, and it went to Barney's heart.

"But why should one forget?" he asked softly, taking his friend's hand in a firm, loving clasp. "Why forget such a beautiful, holy thing as your

love? Rather, with your great English writer, I would say, 'Lord! Keep our memory green!'"

"But—but—it is such torture! And—it is all so dark!"

"It need not be torture," was Barney's steady answer: "It may be all peace, and there is light for all who need it, for 'the Light shineth in the darkness.' A young priest once said to me: 'It is only through suffering that we come to know ourselves. Our Lord Himself had to suffer before He could accomplish His great work; and so much we suffer before our work is effectual.' Don't you think that priest was right?"

"You have never suffered?" said the Major.

"I have never had any great sorrow; though when I was a child, I suffered much more than any one ever imagined, only my dear father. But, of course, suffering will be my share some day too."

"Why do you think that?"

"'The servant is not above his Master!'" quoted Barney softly.

The Major stood up suddenly; his lips compressed, his eyes dark with pain and longing. Such trustful, loving faith he could scarcely understand.

"I have been presumptuous," said Barney gently, "forgive me! But I am only trying to help you! I am so sorry for your loneliness and pain!"

"You have helped," returned the Major quietly, putting his hand on Barney's shoulder, but keeping his young friend's hand held fast in his own. "The

pain is a little less hard to endure ; the darkness is not so black ! "

Barney's grey eyes shone.

" I shall pray for you every day " he said simply. " I shall pray that the dawn may come soon, and with it hope, and trust, and God's eternal peace ! "

CHAPTER XII

BARNEY MAKES SOME CALLS

ON the day after Barney's visit to Coolcrannach, he attended early Mass, as was his custom, and having breakfasted with his father, ordered his horse.

He was standing on the snowy steps, when his father appeared fully equipped in angler's attire, with rod, bag, waders, all complete.

"Going fishing?" inquired Barney in surprise.

The inanity of the question exasperated Mr. O'Hagan, and he answered with biting irony: "I am not! It's to a garden party I'm going, and this rod is for catching butterflies!"

"My mistake," returned Barney, in no way abashed, "but your costume suggested fishing."

"And your conversation suggests fatuity," was the complimentary reply.

Barney smiled agreeably.

"Would you mind seeing after the chickens for the dinner, to-night?" he asked.

".And do you think it's the usual or proper thing for a man with a house full of servants to chase round killing chickens?" demanded his father. "Wouldn't I look a purty fool?"

"You would, undoubtedly," agreed Barney, "but

it's no more foolish to chase round killing chickens, than to attire one's self in a quaint costume, such as yours, and sit all day killing fish."

Now, this was a sore point between father and son; for Barney, usually so lovingly anxious to anticipate his father's least wish, had always refused, most unswervingly, to participate in any of the so-called "Sports," to Mr. O'Hagan's chagrin. Barney's wide charity embraced not only God's humanity but also the helpless animals He has created for man's use, but surely not for man's selfish, cruel pleasure.

"I was going to catch some salmon trout for your dinner party to-night," observed Mr. O'Hagan icily; "but divil a fish will your friend the Major taste, Barney, after that impertinence!"

"All right," said Barney cheerfully, "but at that rate, you really must see about chickens; else, there'll be no dinner!"

"What's wrong with the chickens?"

"I don't know, and that's what is bothering me! You see, I went to Molly this morning to request her ——"

"Request her?" echoed Mr. O'Hagan; "why not order her?"

"Man alive," exclaimed Barney, "you must never order Molly, because if you do, all the fat will be in the fire. That's where I made a great mistake last summer the week you spent gallivanting up in Dublin, leaving me to the mercy of the cook."

"I'd like to see you at the mercy of some one,

just for a change," chuckled Mr. O'Hagan; "it might take some of the conceit out of you."

"Molly did worse than take some conceit out of me; she took all the strength out of me! Every day, for six consecutive days, she sent me up for dinner a fried chop. On the sixth night I was so unstrung that I dreamt I was a fried chop, or, to be exact, a chop about to be fried! It was most unpleasant; and I awoke quite feverish. And at dinner that same evening I had *a fried chop*! The day being Friday, I struck and went down to interview Molly, and asked her why she wished to ruin both our souls by fried chops on a day of abstinence. She said that her head was a bit 'quare' and that she had forgotten about the blessed Friday, but that she would 'bile' me a couple of eggs and the chop would do for Saturday, re-heated. Then my 'dander' rose. I quietly but firmly told Molly that I would not have that chop, or any other chop for my dinner the next day, and ordered her to cook steak and green peas for Saturday. Molly rose and faced me, a majestic figure in her wrath, her shawl awry, a huge basting spoon in one hand and a poker in the other.

"'An' what does the likes av you mane be quarrellin' wid the good food God has sint ye?' she demanded. I tried to point out to her that I was not quarrelling with the food, but with her, and that I didn't think God was responsible for sending me fried chops, but that *she* was! Her only answer was a contemptuous laugh, and some scathing remarks addressed to the basting spoon.

'Musha! Is it the likes av him!' said she, as she looked me up and down, 'that ud thry to taich a cook what to do an' what not to do! Him that spinds all the day brushin' his hair, an' polishin' his nails!' I told Molly that we were speaking about chops, not hair or nails, and I also told her that if she didn't obey my orders she had better leave. Instantly she threw aside the basting spoon and poker and flinging herself into an armchair, folded her arms, and looked up at me. 'I take no ordhers from anywan,' she declared, 'naither from man nor mortal, an' sorra the fut will I stir out av me house. So take yerself out av the kitchen, or there'll be wigs on the green before mornin'."

"Of course, I was routed. Molly evidently regarded the house as hers, and as mistress, would not be bossed by me. So I crept away, bitterly reproaching myself that I hadn't asked Molly to give me a change of food, instead of ordering her."

"And did you have the fried chop on Saturday?" inquired Mr. O'Hagan, maliciously, as Barney paused in his narrative.

"I did not! I went round to Dunscallion, and Mrs. Murphy gave me such a dinner of roast beef and Yorkshire pudding, with strawberries and cream for dessert, as would take the cockles off your heart."

"Just like the Murphys!' observed Mr. O'Hagan, admiringly; "but tell me about the chickens, Barney."

"Well, I requested Molly to cook four chickens for the dinner, and ——"

"But you don't want four chickens for three people!" interrupted Mr. O'Hagan.

"I'm inviting Fr. O'Brien and Mr. MacKenna as well as Major Hamilton," explained Barney.

His father looked pleased, and Barney again took up the broken thread of his narrative.

"Molly informed me that there are only two chickens fit to be 'kilt,' and that if I had told her in time she would have had two more ready. I asked her how would her knowing that they were to die alter their age, and also how she knew when a chicken was fit to be 'kilt.' 'Musha!' she exclaimed scornfully, 'bud it's the ignorant lot ye must be in Dublin!' And that's all the satisfaction I could get out of her!" finished the crestfallen Barney, despairingly.

"I think Molly is right," was Mr. O'Hagan's unsympathetic reply; "What sort of a gom are you that you don't know something about poultry, and you professing to have learnt all about cattle."

Barney's grey eyes opened wide in astonishment.

"But I don't profess to have learnt all about cattle!" he contradicted; "There isn't a cow in the field that doesn't know more about me than I do about her! I can read compassion for me in their bovine eyes! And, anyhow, there's a great difference between cows and chickens."

"If Fr. John is coming to dinner, I'll see to it that he has a good one," said Mr. O'Hagan, "but it's not for you nor Major Hamilton I'd trouble

myself. Go on now, and don't waste any more time here."

With the ready courtesy which Barney, even in his wildest moods always showed his father, he shouldered the fishing tackle, and the two descended the steps and started slowly along the snowy drive. Barney's docile horse pacing by its master's side.

"Where are you off to now?" Mr. O'Hagan inquired, as they were nearing a small gate which led into the barnyard.

"I'm going to make some calls," began Barney, but he got no further, for at that moment most unearthly, blood-curdling howls broke the stillness of the morning.

"That dog of yours has a most horrible voice!" exclaimed Mr. O'Hagan in sudden irritation; "why don't you shoot it?"

"The dog, or the voice?"

"The dog!"

Barney appeared surprised.

"I know the dog has a horrible voice," he admitted, "in fact, the most horrible voice ever heard! But if we start killing off every animate and inanimate being that happens to possess a horrible voice where would all the donkeys and parrots, and peacocks, and pigs, and even cats be? As for bagpipes and gramaphones, and opera singers, why, they wouldn't have a ghost of a chance."

"Where did you pick up the brute?" demanded the almost distracted Mr. O'Hagan, as the canine shrieks rent the air; "and what is it baying for?"

"I didn't pick him up," Barney acknowledged wearily, "he picked me up at Tollough Fair, a while back; and he always protests like that if I go out and leave him behind."

"Then take him with you, for heaven's sake!" implored Mr. O'Hagan, "or muzzle him! He'll get himself killed, if not."

Barney groaned dismally, as he answered: "He'll get me killed if I do take him! He has got a most disconcerting and unreasonable habit of sitting down suddenly before the horse when in full gallop, and ——"

"How, in the name of commonsense could a dog be sitting down and in full gallop at the same time?" demanded Mr. O'Hagan, who was becoming hopelessly confused.

"I meant the horse was galloping, and the dog sitting down," Barney explained, "and whenever the dog sits down, the galloping horse falls over the dog, and I fall over the galloping horse! You have no idea how extraordinarily disagreeable it is to fall over a dog that is sitting down, and a horse that is galloping! It's worse than the water chute, and helter-skelter and switch-back all combined."

"What do you mean by allowing this outrageous din to go on?" roared Mr. O'Hagan.

"How can I stop it?" exclaimed Barney, whose harrassed nerves were beginning to give way. "I didn't engage that dog to make the din! On the contrary, I've begged him again and again to desist if he has any respect for himself or me! I don't enjoy it, you know, any more than you do!"

"Barney," gasped his father, "you deserve a horse-whipping more this minute than ever you have done in your life. I'll ——"

But just then one of the stable boys tore down the drive. "Masther Barney! Masther Barney!" he shouted, "if ye don't muzzle or murdher that divil av a dog it's a dozen chickens ye'll be havin' for dinner, instead av four!"

"Is the misguided animal killing the fowl, Rory?" asked Barney, much dismayed.

"No then, your honour! Bud 'tis dhroppin' down sinseless the innocent craturs are wid fright; an' all the misfortunate ould hins are goin' out av their minds, so they are!"

"Oh, let the wretched dog out, then," exclaimed the goaded Barney; but before Rory could obey, the sharp, cruel hissing of a whip was heard close by, and the dog's howls were changed to a scream of agony. Then a hoarse voice cried savagely: "Take that, ye ugly, ill-timpered brute! An' that! I'll lay ye stiff some day!" The barnyard gate flew open, and a great, lumbering dog, its coat all wet and foam dropping from its mouth, rushed out, and flung itself at its master's feet for protection. Barney turned quickly, his handsome face blanched with sudden passion, and confronted Jem, the other stable boy. With a muttered exclamation of wrath, the young man caught Jem by the collar. It was in vain that Jem struggled to get free; Barney's muscles were like finely-tempered steel.

"I see you've been at your cruel tricks

again!" thundered Barney, his voice rough through passion.

"The baste desarved what he got," whined Jem, whose face was white with fear.

"I have warned you many times," said Barney, "that if ever again I caught you ill-treating helpless animals, unable to defend themselves, that it would be worse for you!"

"Mr. O'Hagan! Rory! Save me!" cried Jem, as Barney forced him to his knees in the snow, and as he felt the sharp sting of his young master's riding whip; "he'll—he'll murdher me!"

Mr. O'Hagan was simply electrified! He looked at his son in the blankest astonishment! Could this be good-humoured, gentle Barney? This erect, tense young figure, with distended nostrils, and quivering mouth, and blazing eyes, no longer grey, but black?

Jem, however, did not get his full meed of just punishment, for Barney's long years of rigorous self-control had not been wasted. He had, moreover, all the shrinking of a refined nature from mere brute force. The whip had only descended twice, when he recollected himself, and instantly let Jem free.

"I'll have the law on ye!" snarled the man as he scrambled to his feet.

"Do!" retorted Barney contemptuously; "but do you think I care about the law, or anything else, where suffering, helpless animals are concerned? As it is, you leave here at once!"

"You're not the masther!" sneered Jem. "Mr. O'Hagan," he continued, "ye won't be lettin' your son thrate me like that?"

Barney's eyes sought his father's, his heart swelling under the servant's insult. Mr. O'Hagan's face was wonderfully tender as he caught that look.

"You are right," said Barney, forcing himself to speak; "I forgot myself! My father is master here. It shall be as he wishes."

"That's the biggest mistake you ever made in your life, Barney," said his father, quietly; "I'm surprised at you!" Then he turned to Jem, who had hoped to see his young master humiliated. "I never contradict my son's orders," said he, "no more than he would contradict mine. But in this case, I entirely agree with him."

Barney flashed him a look of gratitude, but Jem had no answer. He crawled away, without a word; but as soon as he was out of Barney's reach, he vowed vengeance, black and bitter, on his young master. And these threats he afterwards carried into execution with all the thoroughness of a cowardly nature.

"Bedad, Barney," chuckled Mr. O'Hagan, delightedly, "I've hopes of you yet! You've some spirit, after all!"

Barney, whose strong hands were trembling a little, and whose face was still rather white, was obliged to smile. His father shouldered his fishing tackle and tramped away, while Barney turned to Rory. "Rory," said he, "take this

unhappy animal round to the stables and wash the cuts with a disinfectant."

But the boy (he was only about fourteen) shrank back.

"You don't mean to say you're afraid?" Barney asked in astonishment.

Rory was silent; between the fear of the dog and fear of his young master, he was almost beyond speech. Barney himself was absolutely fearless; none the less, however, could he pity and understand fear in others. But, unfortunately, his own nerves were tingling and irritated and, therefore, his reprimand to poor Rory was rather severe.

"What is the use of your being a stable-boy if you are afraid of animals?" he asked sharply. "Take the dog round, instantly, and do as I tell you!"

Rory broke into sudden, nervous crying. "I—I can't!" he sobbed. "Oh, don't make me go near it, yer honour!" he cried in terror as Barney made a quick, impatient movement. "I'm afeard, so I am!"

"Well, this is pleasant!" groaned Barney; "even if there be a dinner, there'll be very few diners, for I shan't have time to ask them!"

"Stop crying, Rory," he added, in his usual pleasant manner, "there's nothing to cry about. Come round to the stables; I shall want you."

Reluctantly the boy obeyed; but as soon as they were in the stable, he made a sudden rush for the door. Barney was too quick for him, however,

for just as he thought he was free, Barney's hand gripped his collar like a vice. Then the young man calmly shut and bolted the door, and looked down rather quizzically at his captive. " Why were you trying to get away from me, Rory ? " he asked, quite quietly.

" I—I thought ye wor—goin'—to—to bate me—like ye did—Jem ! " quavered poor Rory.

Barney smiled ; but it was rather a shamed smile. " Well, said he, " you won't improve matters by running away, so don't try that trick again." Then he sat down on a heap of fragrant straw, and taking the boy's rough, shaking hands in his own, drew him gently towards him.

" What's the trouble ? " he asked, smilingly ; " you needn't be afraid to tell me, a bhuachaill."

Rory caught his breath, and hesitated ; but Barney's manner was so gentle, his tone expressed such quiet sympathy that all the boy's fear fled, and was replaced by a great trust and gratitude. Between many a bitter sob he told the truth—that he was a coward, and couldn't help himself.

" Don't you think, Rory," said Barney gently, when Rory had finished speaking, " that you ought to fight this nervousness, and try to become braver ? It would be a battle well worth the winning. Or is it that you have tried, and that the battle is too hard ? "

" Yes," whispered Rory, " that's it, yer honour ! I've thryed an' thryed an'—an' I can't —get—sinse ! Oh, Master Barney," he wailed, covering his shamed face with a rough sleeve, " ye—don't know what

it manes to be just—a coward—an'—an'—— " but poor Rory could say no more.

" I think I can understand how hard it must be," was the quiet answer; " but you mustn't lose heart, Rory. Just keep on trying, even when it seems most hopeless; and, remember, a bhuachaill, that God is with you always. There is nothing to fear, for nothing can harm you. And now," added Barney, standing up and smiling, " can I trust you not to run away again, but to fetch me some warm water and soft rag? "

" Yes, yer honour."

Barney flung the door wide open, but Rory paused, and looked up at him.

" Ye'll not be tellin' any wan what I'm afther sayin' to ye? " he asked fearfully; " I'm afeard av anywan knowin'."

" I'll tell no one," Barney assured him; " you are not afraid of my knowing, are you? "

" Not now," answered Rory quickly, as he sped away on his errand. He soon returned, and made a very efficient helper. When the dog was lying comfortably in the warm straw, Barney turned to him and said smilingly: " Now I want you to do something that will be very hard for you. Mind, I'm not going to force you; but I want you to make a very big effort to be brave." He put his hand lightly on the dog's coat, and looked at Rory: " Put your hand beside mine here, Rory," said he quietly.

The boy shuddered, " I can't! " he breathed; " Oh, Masther Barney, don't make me! I can't! "

"Try," said Barney, very gently; "if you do, Bran will be your friend and protector always. He knows that you and I have been kind to him, and is grateful. And there is absolutely no danger! Don't you trust me, Rory?"

"Yes!"

"Then prove to me that you do."

The boy looked at Barney in desperation; but the clear strength in the young man's eyes, the quiet confidence that he would be obeyed, gave Rory courage. Slowly, he laid one shaking hand beside that of Barney, who bent down and said a few caressing words into Bran's ear. The dog whined softly, and then licked both hands lovingly, its brown eyes full of gratitude.

"Now you are all right!" exclaimed Barney cheerily, as he stood up, and shook the straw from his coat. "Don't tell me you are a coward any more, Rory."

"I did it for you!" muttered the boy, "I was afeard all the time."

Barney was touched; he laid a kind hand on Rory's head.

"Thank you," said he, simply; "You'll take care of Bran, whilst I am away, will you not?"

"Yes, yer honour."

They went into the yard, and Barney mounted his horse, which had followed its master from the gate, of its own accord.

"When you get used to Bran," said Barney, as he cantered out of the yard, "you will lose your fear of all other animals as well."

The *Angelus* was ringing by the time Barney arrived in the village. Kerry, the horse, was in a reflective mood and proceeded slowly, although his master reasoned with him and remonstrated with him by turns. At length Kerry came to a standstill. Barney gave a resigned sigh.

"Another milestone," he sadly remarked to a saucy rook, which was chuckling and leering at him in a most impudent manner. "I'm beginning to wonder whether they are stepping stones to heaven or to the other place. If ever a man was heart-scalded, I am this day!'

He swung himself out of the saddle, and addressed the horse, very seriously. "Now, Kerry," said he, "do think better of it, and oblige me by going on. This dinner to-night will be a dead failure."

But Kerry only shook his head, and looked at his master with beautiful, soft eyes. Barney at once kissed the silky forehead, whereat the derisive rook broke into a fit of impish laughter. Barney glanced up disgustedly at the swaying bird, and suddenly realised where he was; outside the little village chapel. Never had Barney passed by God's house without saying a few words to the waiting Master within; the sagacious horse had stopped, according to custom. But to-day, somehow, through the usual sonorous harmony, discordant notes were running.

"Kerry," said Barney sadly, as he looked into his horse's intelligent, loving eyes, "I almost wish you hadn't stopped, I'm rather reluctant to meet

my Friend, to-day! As we say in Gaelic: 'there will be great shame on me before Him.'"

But Kerry only whinnied softly, and tossed his graceful head again.

Very slowly Barney tethered his horse, and then walked up the tiny pathway into the chapel. It was very still before the Tabernacle. The sweetness of the reality of the great loving Presence behind the golden door flooded his young soul with exquisite content. But the peace was not unalloyed; for Barney felt a very honest regret and shame because of his outburst of anger that morning. He never remembered that his anger had been kindled in a noble cause, or that he had done incalculable good to poor Rory. He only remembered that perhaps he had dishonoured the Master whom he followed. For everything seemed so trivial to him as he knelt there; everything, only his love for the dear God, who was hidden in the Tabernacle! And besides, he was rather bewildered and scared. For over fourteen years he had been battling with his temper, and here it was, springing up again like a wicked little animal, sweeping all before it! Barney's fair head was bent very low before his Friend on the altar; and it was a very chastened and sobered young man who came out of the chapel a few moments later.

But as Kerry trotted briskly towards the priest's house, Barney's buoyant spirits rose again, ready for a skirmish with Larry, the priest's boy. The two were at deadly feud, ever since Barney had

told Larry that he didn't groom Fr. John's little brown cob properly.

"Is the priest in?" Barney inquired, as Larry opened the door, and surveyed him with cold disdain.

"Don't hurry yourself to answer me," he continued affably, "I can wait two or three hours, if you like."

"His riverence isn't in, then!" said Larry, the light of battle in his eyes.

"I didn't ask you if he were in *then*," the tantalising Barney remarked, "but if he were in *now*!"

"Arrah, what are ye ramblin' about at all!" exclaimed Larry in disgust; "haven't I toult ye the priest isn't in?"

"Is he out?" was the next question.

"Where in the world would he be, if he isn't in?" roared Larry.

"I didn't come here to answer riddles," Barney informed him calmly. "I came because it struck me that Fr. O'Brien is greatly in need of a good, substantial dinner ——"

"An' do ye think that the people av Ballystack would be waitin' for a Dublin Jackeen to come an' feed their priest, God bless him?" cried Larry, firing up instantly.

Barney passed over the delicate compliment to his own city, as he had purposely made his speech misleading.

"If you'd only let me finish what I was saying, things would be much more pleasant," he sighed, as he vaulted into the saddle. "I mean that

Fr. John is in need of a dinner party; or rather, that I am in need of Fr. John for my dinner to-night; so tell him I shall send the motor for himself and Mr. McKenna at six o'clock." Then he trotted down the road, much refreshed by this encounter with Larry.

He drew rein again before the neat, well slated Vicarage where the minister lived. It was a pretty place, everything orderly and well cared for. The servant who opened the door appeared surprised as she ushered the unexpected visitor into a small study where Mr. McKenna was writing. That gentleman was even more surprised, and somewhat nervous and embarrassed; but Barney's keen insight discovered a sort of wistful eagerness under his reserve.

"I must apologise for paying a call at such an unconventional hour, Mr. McKenna," he said pleasantly, holding out his hand as he spoke. There was something peculiarly winning in Barney's manner, and all the minister's embarrassment vanished. He took his visitor's hand in a cordial grasp.

"Sit down, Mr. O'Hagan," said he. "I am very glad to see you."

Barney sat down and drew off his heavy riding gloves.

"Your friend, Fr. O'Brien, and Major Hamilton are dining with us to-night," said he, "and my father and I would be delighted if you would join us."

The young clergyman was so astonished that

for a moment he could think of no reply. With the exception of Fr. O'Brien, he had no friends in the village, although every one liked him, especially the children.

"I shall not take a refusal," Barney went on smilingly. "I've ordered dinner for five, and if you spoil the table, Molly will give notice. And the winter must be rather a lonely time for you."

"You—you are exceedingly kind!" stammered the minister. "I shall be very pleased indeed to accept your invitation! Yes, the winter is a dreary time in the country; and—I—don't visit anyone, only Fr. John."

Barney gave him a shrewd look.

"I think I understand," he said quietly. "I, too, prefer the city in winter; but then I am a Dubliner, you know."

"And I hail from Belfast!" returned Mr. McKenna, frankly; "but I spent almost three years, working all round Christ Church, and St. Patrick's, and—and—I miss it all—so—much! I should like to work hard, to minister to the poor, and serve them! But here—the poor are not of my persuasion. It seems just—stagnation!"

"I know!" said Barney gently.

The words were few; yet there was such kindly sympathy expressed in Barney's pleasant young voice that the minister's confidence was won at once, and his habitual reserve broken down. "It's like being buried alive!" he added in a sort of despair; "only for Fr. O'Brien, I don't know how I should endure it!"

"I have heard from the people round here," said Barney quietly, "of a certain good Samaritan, who, during many weary months of famine and fever, brought the food from his own table to the starving poor, and kindled fires with his own hands in the fever-stricken cabins! Wasn't that royal service, Mr. McKenna?"

The young minister's pale, ascetic face flushed a vivid crimson; for with the humility and diffidence of a truly good man, he shrank from praise of any kind. He rose abruptly, and went over to the fire, which he started to poke vigorously.

"Wouldn't it be a good thing," remarked Barney, smilingly, "if one could poke away one's difficulties as easily as one pokes the ashes out of a fire?"

Mr. McKenna stopped poking the fire, and laughed.

"It might," he answered, "but then it mightn't be so good for one's soul!"

"You're right there!" Barney agreed, with a little sigh; then he roused himself.

"I don't quite understand," said he, "why you don't mix with the people more! They are so friendly."

"With you, yes!" was the quick response, "but not with me! You are one of themselves! I am only—'the ministher, poor crathur!'"

Mr. McKenna's unconscious mimicry was so droll that Barney laughed outright.

"I'm about to say something which you may

resent," said he, "so please put down that poker, Mr. McKenna, or you may be tempted to heave it at me!"

"It must be something pretty bad," remarked the minister, as he obediently laid the poker on one side.

"It's this," said Barney, with a comical look: "I think that 'the ministher, poor crathur,' is as much to blame as the people! Why doesn't he try to make them understand him better?"

"He did try, in the beginning, but then he got depressed, disheartened, and enclosed himself in a shell."

"He'll be pulled out of it to-night, anyhow," smiled Barney.

"For which act of charity he is exceedingly grateful," returned Mr. McKenna earnestly. "But I'm afraid," he added, flushing again, "that you must think me rather impertinent to speak as I did! But I assure you, I—well, I don't quite know why I spoke as I did! I have only met you twice, yet I find myself saying things I have never said to anyone before!" This was said so helplessly that Barney was obliged to smile.

"I am greatly honoured," he said quite frankly; "but I advise you to give the people another chance. You'll find they'll respond to your advances readily enough now that you have been here so long and they know your worth. And there is one person in particular, Mr. McKenna, whose acquaintance I wish you would cultivate, and that is Brian Murphy."

"Why, I scarcely know him at all! He is a very quiet, reserved fellow."

"Yes; but he's a splendid fellow!" exclaimed Barney warmly, "intellectual, cultured and exceedingly interesting, when one knows him. The literary world will hear of him some day. He would be just the companion for you, Mr. McKenna."

The minister looked wistful.

"There's no chance of my ever making his acquaintance," he sighed.

"It's the unexpected that happens," said Barney, with an enigmatic smile; "keep on hoping." Then he stood up, and the minister gave a little sigh of regret that the pleasant half hour was over.

"I was thinking," said Barney, "of what you said about wishing to serve. It brought to my mind one of my favourite texts: 'Those also serve, who only stand and wait.' I think that that serving is the hardest of all, and, therefore, must be very pleasing to God."

"I never thought about it in that way before," replied Mr. McKenna, simply, "but I shall, for the future."

He went to the gate with his visitor, and waited in the snow until Barney had mounted.

"I am sending the motor for Fr. O'Brien and yourself at six o'clock," said Barney, as he bent from the saddle to shake hands.

"Thank you very much," returned the minister, "God speed you!" He stood at the gate, watching the erect, lithe, young figure until Kerry had turned a bend in the road.

Then he went slowly back to his quiet study (more quiet than ever, he felt, after the cheerful ring of a glad young voice) and opened the bible. For the text Barney had quoted rang in his ears, "They also serve, who only stand and wait." After a while he closed the book, and rested his head on his clasped hands.

"Master," he prayed softly, "so long as I serve You, make me content! Give me patience to wait, knowing that it is Your will," and that patient waiting brought him very close to the Master whom he served.

CHAPTER XIII

BARNEY'S DINNER PARTY

AT half past six that evening Mr. O'Hagan went down to the drawing-room, where Barney was already waiting. He was standing before the fire, a picturesque figure in his Gaelic costume; black kilt and brat, as it was evening dress. The gold-mounted sporan, and gold buckles on his shoes, and the exquisite golden Kilkenny brooch that fastened his brat, shone softly in the rich glow. For Barney was Celtic to the heart's core, and always wore the native costume of his country. He was passionately fond of her music and her literature and was a profound Irish scholar.

"Barney," said his father, "do you realise that this will be the first dinner party you ever gave?"

"I hope it will be a success, then," returned Barney.

Mr. O'Hagan chuckled maliciously: "The fish for Fr. John will be a success, anyhow!" said he.

"Did you catch enough for the fish course?" Barney asked, with assumed carelessness.

"Just enough for the priest and myself," returned his father.

"But I say!" remonstrated Barney, who didn't quite know whether his father was joking or not,

"you can't—you really cannot give some of the guests fish ——"

"Trout, Barney; beautiful salmon trout."

"——and leave the others without any!"

"Fresh as daisies they are, too," observed Mr. O'Hagan, dreamily.

"Newly caught fish are usually fresh, aren't they?" demanded the exasperated Barney.

"It would take a naturalist to answer that," said Mr. O'Hagan, "and I'm only an angler."

Before his son could reply, the sound of carriage wheels was heard outside, and a minute later the pawing of hoofs and the champing of bits, and a loud ring at the hall door announced the arrival of one of the guests.

Barney's face brightened, and he went eagerly into the hall to meet Major Hamilton.

"There he is," soliloquised Mr. O'Hagan, "so anxious to welcome the man who punished him so mercilessly a few nights ago! Ah, Barney, a vic ma chree, 'tis yourself that's got a golden heart!"

Meanwhile, Major Hamilton had come up the steps, into the softly-lighted hall, where his young host awaited him.

"Cead failte romhat, a chara," said Barney cheerily, catching the Major's hand; "you've been long enough in the Emerald Isle to know so much Gaelic as that, haven't you?"

"You are very kind," said the Major, giving his hat and coat to a waiting servant, and following his host into the drawing-room. Mr. O'Hagan rose courteously, but there was a shade of embarrass-

ment in the meeting. Barney, however, with his usual tact, came to the rescue.

"I'm afraid," said he, cheerfully, as he gave the Major a chair, "that we shall have to wait for dinner, as Fr. O'Brien has not yet arrived. I suppose he has been delayed by a sick call."

"Perhaps I am a little too early," observed the Major, consulting his watch.

"No, you are punctual, as all your countrymen are," smiled Barney.

"Well," remarked Mr. O'Hagan, "Fr. John is worth waiting for. Eh, Major?"

Major Hamilton's rugged face lit up.

"He is, indeed," he agreed.

"And where does Mr. McKenna come in?" asked Barney.

"If he comes in with the priest, he'll be welcome, anyhow," chuckled Mr. O'Hagan.

"As a matter of fact," acknowledged the Major, "I—er—scarcely know him."

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, then," returned Barney. "You couldn't know a nicer fellow!"

Mr. O'Hagan was alarmed at his son's temerity, as he saw the angry look on their guest's face.

"I'm not obliged to know people!" said the Major, rather haughtily.

"You are!" contradicted Barney; "you are obliged to know your own clergyman! If you weren't such an out and out heathen, Major Hamilton, you would understand what I mean. Isn't that so?"

As he spoke he laid his hand lightly on his friend's shoulder and smiled down at him, in a most disarming manner.

The Major's brow cleared somewhat.

"Well," said he, "perhaps you're right; but why doesn't he make some sort of an advance to me?"

"Man alive!" exclaimed Barney, "how can you expect him to. I suppose you've never given him anything but a stony glare since you came to his parish."

"I know someone in the parish to whom I did worse than give a stony glare, yet who made many advances to me," remarked the Major quietly.

The colour flooded Barney's face, and for a moment he was nonplussed.

"Mr. McKenna is exceedingly shy," he said hurriedly, after a minute's pause.

"May I not plead shyness, too?" demanded the Major.

"You're not shy," said Barney, quickly recovering his audacity, "you are simply cantankerous and ——"

"Barney!" his father interrupted, in desperation, "would you kindly go and see if there be any sign of the motor!"

Barney gave them both a droll look.

"All right," he agreed, "and I'll give orders to your coachman at the same time, Major Hamilton."

"I hope," said Mr. O'Hagan rather anxiously, as the door closed, "that you won't be minding

all that Barney says? He's as full of mischief as a jackdaw, and is always up to some divilment or other."

"He has a purpose in his devilment," returned the Major, rather grimly.

"He'll get himself into hot water, if he's not more careful!" groaned Mr. O'Hagan.

"Not with me, I assure you!" was the quick retort. "I—I have had my lesson on that subject, and I shall not forget it. Your son is a very gentle teacher, Mr. O'Hagan, but a wonderfully efficient one."

"I never met anyone quite so gentle as he," said Mr. O'Hagan, softly. "He is like his mother, Major Hamilton."

"Now that we are alone," continued the Major, speaking, however, with difficulty, "I—I should like to express my regret over that—little episode at the Murphy's party. I have tried to tell your son, but he would not listen; thus proving himself more generous than I, who forced him to apologise before every one."

Mr. O'Hagan was profoundly astonished, he could scarcely believe his ears. That the proud, irascible, obstinate old soldier should so humble himself was nearly incredible. Surely Barney's gentle charity had not been in vain! Obeying a sudden impulse of respect and regard, Mr. O'Hagan held out his hand, which the Major grasped, and from that time the two men were friends.

There was silence for a while, for when one feels deeply, one is usually silent.

At length, however, the cheerful toot of a motor horn was heard, and presently lights flashed past the windows, a confusion of voices in the hall, and then Barney came into the room with his tardy guests.

"I did my best to make Mr. McKenna come without me, so that you could start dinner in time, but he refused!" exclaimed Fr. O'Brien, who, in his eagerness to shake hands with his host, and with his friend, Major Hamilton, appeared to be tying himself into a knot. At last he compromised matters by giving a hand to each at the same time.

"He was quite right not to come, Fr. O'Brien," said the Major; "we couldn't begin without the guest of honour."

The priest gave the speaker a shrewd look, and then smiled knowingly.

"In this case," he remarked, "the guest of honour arrived first."

Major Hamilton's bronzed cheeks reddened; such an idea had never crossed his mind. He had no time to reply, however, for Mr. McKenna had joined them, and was holding out his hand to the Major rather diffidently. To tell the truth the young clergyman was somewhat in awe of his redoubtable parishioner. Major Hamilton, who was conscious that Barney's dancing grey eyes were fixed upon him, and who felt singularly helpless under their fire, resolved that he would not give the minister a "stony glare" as usual.

"How do you do, Mr. McKenna?" he said

graciously, as he took the other's hand; "I hope you had a pleasant drive?"

"Delightful!" returned Mr. McKenna, who was perfectly astonished at the Major's civility. "My word!" he added boyishly, "we skimmed over the snow as fast as a bird could fly! It's a first-rate car, and the chauffeur is a first-rate driver!"

"I shall tell Miles that," said Barney, who had just come up. "It is only fair that he should know how people appreciate his splendid driving." Then as the dinner gong sounded and they all filed out of the drawing-room, he turned to the Major and said mischievously: "Upon my word, you're coming on, sir! If I took you in hand for a few weeks, I'd make you quite a decent member of society."

Barney's audacity almost took the Major's breath away.

"And do you know what I should do if I were to take you in hand?" he snapped.

"You wouldn't do anything," said Barney, with a whimsical smile, "though I don't doubt that you would try."

"You should learn to have some respect for your elders, even if I were obliged to teach you by means of a horse-whip."

"You'd never succeed, Major Hamilton," averred Barney, standing courteously aside for his guest to pass first. "As Miles says, 'it's the heart-scald I am, an' no mistake.'"

By this time they were in the dining-room, where the others were already seated round the beautifully

laid table, with its snowy linen, shining glass, glittering silver and delicate white chrysanthemums.

Barney took his place at the bottom of the table, but first he put a chair for Major Hamilton on his right side, and remained standing until his guest was seated.

The conversation then became general, ranging over a variety of pleasant and interesting subjects. For it was really conversation, not mere vapid table talk. Each one was an educated and well-read man, and each showed to the best advantage. For there was something in their elder host's genial hospitality and in their younger host's exquisite courtesy that brought out the best in all.

"Are you fond of fish, Barney? asked his father, innocently, when the soup had been removed and the fish course made its appearance.

"I am, when I can get it," was the response.

"You are a philosopher!" said Mr. McKenna.

"I am not; I'm only an unfortunate fellow who is always being chided and being made eat humble pie."

"If this delicious salmon trout constitutes humble pie," said the Major, "I strongly advise you to eat it. It is the most excellent fish I have ever tasted, and perfectly cooked."

Mr. O'Hagan beamed, for the Major was an epicure and knew what he was talking about.

"I endorse Major Hamilton's opinion," said Fr. O'Brien; "where do you get your fish from, Mr. O'Hagan?"

"Out of the water, of course, Father," returned

Barney; "where else would he get it from? There are no land fish, that I know of."

"Can't you talk sense, Barney?" asked Fr. O'Brien, "and tell me where this fish came from."

"If you must know, then, Father, it came from the home stream, and my father caught it especially for yourself."

"I'm inclined to envy you that stream," said the Major to his host.

"Do you like fishing, Major Hamilton? Because if you do, I shall be delighted if you would use our stream whenever you wish. You see," he went on, with a malicious glance at Barney, who was gazing rather blankly at his empty plate, "my son and I run this property jointly, therefore, I can give you leave to fish in the river."

"Do you mean that your son would not give me leave?" inquired the astonished Major.

"Ask him."

The Major looked at Barney, who had flushed at his father's words.

"I would not, Major Hamilton," he said, returning his friend's glance with a frank smile.

"The fact is," Mr. O'Hagan explained, "Barney objects on principle to all sorts of sports. He —"

"I do not!" Barney struck in; "I'm exceedingly fond of every kind of genuine sport."

"Oh!" remarked the Major, rather dryly; "now I understand; but as this fish has been killed, you might as well eat some of it."

"He might," observed Mr. O'Hagan, who was bent on annoying the unfortunate Barney in his

usual merciless fashion; "but he won't get the chance now. Do you know, he never eats shrimps or lobster or prawns, although he is very fond of them, because they are boiled alive; and if we happen to have fish, or game, such as hare, for dinner, he goes to the poulterer's to inquire whether the hare was coursed, and how the fish was caught."

This was only a jest, but there was a general laugh at Barney's expense; and the kindly Fr. O'Brien, who was sorry for him, saw a flash of resentment in his grey eyes, subdued, however, as quickly as it had come.

"To jeer an opposing opinion is not sound argument, nor even logical," said Barney, good-humouredly; "it's just a sign of weakness. Isn't that so, Major Hamilton? I appeal to you as a soldier, who knows the rules of war."

"I'm bound to admit you are right," agreed the Major. "We're caught there, Mr. O'Hagan."

"So long as this fish was caught," chuckled that gentleman, "I don't care a jot."

After this, to Barney's great relief, the conversation again became general, and at length turned on travelling and the behaviour of the different officials.

"I have heard of some of our own railway men asking the most disconcerting yet practical questions," said Barney. "Once, when Mrs. Murphy wished to travel from Westland Row to Dunleary, she ——"

"Excuse my interrupting you," said his father, "but where is Dunleary?"

Barney looked at him.

"You know as well as I do," said he; "There is a splendid harbour at Dunleary, where the mail boats arrive."

"You mean Kingstown, I suppose," said Mr. McKenna.

"I do not," returned Barney, with heightened colour; "I mean Dunleary. You may call it Kingstown if you like, but then you may call chalk cheese for that matter. It won't alter the chalk, however."

"Tell us about Mrs. Murphy, Barney," interposed the priest hastily, anxious to avoid a controversy.

"Well, Father," said Barney, "Mrs. Murphy wanted to go to Dunleary by the three o'clock train. Being Irish, she naturally went for the three o'clock train at twenty minutes past three. Curiously enough, however, when she sailed into the station she found to her surprise that the train had gone."

"Punctual, for a wonder!" observed Major Hamilton.

"It was not punctual," returned Barney; "it had left at five minutes before three! The ticket collector expressed his regret, and told Mrs. Murphy to come back at four, for the next train. So she departed, and did some shopping, and had lunch, and then discovered, when she was in O'Connell Street, that it was ten to four! So she raced madly back to Westland Row, and tore up the steps, over to the ticket collector, who looked slightly annoyed. 'I've come for the four o'clock

train!' gasped Mrs. Murphy. 'Well, ye won't get it, ma'am,' he answered, 'it's gone five minutes ago.' Mrs. Murphy was grievously disappointed, and the man told her to come back again at five, when another train would be going to Dunleary. The ticket collector appeared rather interested in the business, for, being an Irishman, and having to do with Irish railways, he knew that the whole matter was largely a lottery.

At two minutes past five Mrs. Murphy made another charge for the station, scattering her belongings to right and left as she ran. She was just in time to see the red lights of the five o'clock train receding in the distance.

"In the name of commonsense, ma'am," exclaimed the ticket collector, as he picked up her umbrella and bags and parcels, 'why don't you come in time?'"

"Well, he couldn't say less!" laughed Fr. O'Brien; "I think he was very polite."

"But did the lady ever get a train that day?" asked the Major.

"Not she! The mingled scorn and commiseration in the ticket collector's eyes made her feel worm-like; so she crept away, and the next day took a tram to Dunleary."

"I can sympathise with her reluctance in meeting with that ticket collector again," observed the minister.

"Sadie Murphy had another ridiculous experience," resumed Barney. "She was staying in the neighbourhood of historic old Cullenswood,

and some one had told her there was a special train which ran from Ranelagh station to Westland Row station."

"Why, it would be as easy to go to America on a jaunting car, as to get to Westland Row that way!" exclaimed Mr. O'Hagan.

"Of course, it would! But Sadie went to enquire at Ranelagh for that special train! The porter, nevertheless, didn't even answer the inane question. He asked her another one. 'Arrah, woman,' said he, looking at her slowly from head to foot, as if doubting her sanity; 'do ye know where ye are livin' at all?' She was so confused that for the moment she quite forgot where she was living, but at length she stammered out that she was staying at Cullenswood. 'Well,' the porter counselled her, 'ye'd betther go back there as quick as ye can!' and she went back, feeling an absolute fool, as she told me afterwards, yet the man had been polite, in a characteristically Celtic manner."

"Are all the Murphys such indifferent travellers?" Mr. McKenna asked.

"No; Mr. Murphy and his eldest daughter are first-rate travellers."

"Wait until you are obliged to travel with Barney himself," said Mr. O'Hagan, in disgusted tones, "and you'll realise what a bad traveller really is!"

"You're joking," said the priest; "I'm sure Barney would make a capital travelling companion, and a most capable one."

"You've never tried him," returned Mr. O'Hagan, grimly; "and did you ever see his writing, Fr. John?"

"I can't say that I did."

"Good for you that you didn't! You'd never get over it!"

Barney shrugged his shoulders.

"If I want a character, I shan't apply to my father for it," he said, as he served that gentleman with some delicious slices of breast of chicken.

"Barney and I once went to France," proceeded Mr. O'Hagan, "and the memory of the return journey is still a nightmare to me, all because of his abominable writing and criminal carelessness!"

Barney reddened slightly.

"The writing wasn't so bad!" he protested, defiantly. "Like the man in the pantomime, who said he had a good voice, only it sounded rotten (please excuse the slang), I maintain that I write well, only it looks bad! And I never intended to be careless!"

"You did!" contradicted his father. "You thought of nothing only larking all over the ship, and hindering the sailors at their work."

"I was helping them," exclaimed Barney, "teaching them English."

"Do tell us about that voyage, Mr. O'Hagan," said the minister, who enjoyed seeing the half vexed, half amused, but wholly winsome manner in which the unfortunate young host took his father's teasing.

"Well," said Barney, with a resigned sigh, "if

I must be misjudged and disgraced, I suppose I must bear it; but do please give me a little more ham, to fortify me."

"You've had sufficient ham," returned Mr. O'Hagan, "too much salt meat is bad for the complexion, Barney."

Barney's face was a study, but he kept on steadily eating his dinner. The butler, however, who knew that his goaded young master had had no fish, and very little ham, calmly cut some generous slices himself, and put them on Barney's plate.

"All the time we were in France," began Mr. O'Hagan, "Barney spent his time giving orders exactly the reverse to my wishes, and ——"

"Why don't you polish up your French, then?" interrupted his son.

"If I did, itself, I shouldn't have spoken it!" was the cool reply. "I took you with me to save trouble, not for the sake of your company."

"Well, I object to being an interpreter," said Barney.

"Oh, don't trouble yourself!" exclaimed his father; "you won't be asked any more! I wouldn't travel with you again if I were to be paid for it! And let me tell you, Barney, I'd be thankful if you'd have the manners to stop talking and let me speak!"

"Oh, go on," said Barney, "everyone knows you say more than your prayers."

"When we were leaving Calais," Mr. O'Hagan continued, "I ordered him to write the labels, and address the trunks. This he did in such a

villainous manner that no human being could possibly decipher them! The result was that everything got lost! All Barney said when he heard it was to suggest that we should work our passage home."

"Well, what else could I say?" exclaimed Barney. "I was always told to be optimistic. And I explained to you I was very sorry, and apologised in an abject manner."

"Oh, yes, you said you were sorry, but you looked glad; ferociously glad!"

"I can't help my looks!" cried Barney stormily.

"Would you oblige us by allowing your father to tell this story?" inquired the Major with ironical politeness.

Barney gave him a mirthful look.

"I beg your pardon, Major Hamilton," said he, "but you don't know how hard it is to endure this calumny."

"You'll have to endure something harder, if you don't keep quiet," retorted his father. Then as Barney remained mute, he continued: "I remonstrated with him gently enough, and pointed out that his conduct was most unsatisfactory, and that I would have no more of it. The result was that he pretended to be stupefied, and wouldn't answer a word, good, bad or indifferent. The tickets were afterwards found in his overcoat pocket, and four weeks later we recovered our luggage."

"Well, that beats Bannagher!" exclaimed Barney, as his father paused; "you say you merely re-

monstrated with me! Why, you ordered me down to our state cabin, as if I were a dog, and —— "

" Dogs don't usually occupy state cabins, Barney," interposed his father.

" And when you had me there," continued Barney unheedingly, " you locked the door. I don't know why you locked the door, and you didn't know, yourself, either. You weren't responsible for your actions, because of the rage you were in. I firmly believe you'd have beaten me if I were younger."

" I should, right enough," agreed Mr. O'Hagan.

" I don't quite remember the exact words you used," said Barney, " but I know that at the end of that ghastly half hour I was a complete physical and mental wreck, and utterly demoralised! I had a hazy idea that I was an unmitigated scoundrel, who had, from infancy, been a bane to decent society. Also, I was conscious that I had been the direct cause of my grand-parents' death, and that I would be the means of your ruination, both here and hereafter. Furthermore, I was convinced that I would end my days on the gallows, for so your words implied. I remember wondering vaguely why such a monster of iniquity should be alive at all! I've never got over that 'gentle remonstrance,'" finished Barney in great disgust.

" You're all at liberty to believe whichever version of the story you most fancy," observed Mr. O'Hagan dryly.

" I'll take the liberty of believing neither!" laughed Fr. O'Brien.

"Have you any more anecdotes about travelling, Mr. O'Hagan?" asked the minister, turning to Barney.

"Plenty; but I shan't tell them; my father would only contradict them."

The dessert arrived opportunely at this moment, and Barney became busy serving each guest with his special fruit. When the cheese had been removed, and Mr. O'Hagan had produced some excellent cigars, the butler came in with a message for Barney.

"There's a couple av people belowstairs, Master Barney," said he, "an' they're wantin' to see ye."

"But I can't go now," replied Barney; "I'm engaged. Didn't you tell them so?"

"I did, thin; bud 'tis Mr. an' Mrs. Casey, an' Casey is in wan av his quarrelsome moods, an' herself says that no wan, not even his riverence here, can come over him like yer honour."

Barney's face grew crimson, and he rose hurriedly from the table; then he recollected himself, and turned courteously to the wondering guests.

"Will you excuse me," said he, "but I had better get these people away at once."

It was some time before he returned, and then he looked rather amused.

"Well, Barney," asked Fr. O'Brien, "how did you manage to get your visitors away?"

Barney smiled.

"I used diplomacy, Father," he answered. "I told Mrs. Casey she was the most wonderful woman

on earth, and I told Mr. Casey, he was the most wonderful man, and they went away like lambs."

"In other words," observed Mr. O'Hagan, "you made a liar of yourself. But it is good practice for your profession."

"Well," remarked Barney carelessly, "you're always making a liar of me yourself, so it's nothing uncommon!"

Here there was a timid knock, and Rory put his head into the room. "It's Masther Barney, I'm wantin'," he said rather nervously.

"Master Barney is here," replied Barney; "but don't stand like that, Rory," he added, "it makes me nervous to look at you! If that door shuts suddenly, you're head will fall off, you know. Do come in."

"If ye plaze, yer honour," answered Rory, "I'm not fit to be seen."

"Well, you ought to be," said Barney, cheerfully, "come in, anyhow, and shut the door."

Thus adjured, Rory came in, looking very much abashed.

"And what can Master Barney do for you?" asked Barney.

"If ye plaze," said Rory, "it's—it's not me, it's —it's the dog."

"You don't mean to tell me," exclaimed Barney, rather blankly, "that he's weeping again?"

"I'm thinkin'," said Rory, "that 'tis wantin' to be with yourself he is! He's onaisy in his mind like, an'——"

"In his what?" interrupted Mr. O'Hagan. "Sure the animal hasn't got any mind!"

Barney sighed, and glanced down at his patent leather evening shoes, "I can't go into the yard now," said he, "whether that dog be 'onaisy in his mind,' or not! I really can't! Go back and take care of him, Rory, and tell him to behave himself."

Now, the unfortunate Rory had been taking care of Bran the whole day, and was completely worn out. Barney, however, was ignorant of the fact.

"If ye plaze," began Rory, desperately, but Barney cut him short.

"I don't please," said he, with kindly peremptoriness; "go away, Rory, and don't be bothering me."

The boy dared not say anything more, and withdrew hurriedly; but he did not go back to Bran, as he had been ordered. He went down into the back kitchen, and wept copiously. There Miles found him, and heard his story. The kind-hearted chauffeur resolved to interview Barney again, especially as the dog had begun tearing down the stable door.

Accordingly he presented himself in the drawing-room, and quite calmly explained to Barney that something had got to be done, and that quickly. Before his disgusted young master could reply, Major Hamilton interposed eagerly.

"If this dog wants to be with you, Mr. O'Hagan, pray allow him to come here. I'm certain none of us will object."

"I'm very fond of dogs," agreed the minister, heartily.

"And they of me," supplemented Fr. O'Brien.

"Ay," said Mr. O'Hagan, "but there are dogs and dogs! Eh, Barney?"

"You are all very kind," said Barney; "but this animal isn't just like other dogs! It's—it's—"

"It's a monkey, not a dog at all!" remarked Mr. O'Hagan decisively.

"Oh!" exclaimed the Major, rather taken aback; "I thought the boy said it was a dog!"

"Perhaps it's one of those dog-faced monkeys, such as the baboon!" suggested Mr. McKenna, as if it were quite an ordinary thing for young gentlemen to keep tame baboons about a house.

"It is not," said Barney, "it's a monkey-faced dog."

Major Hamilton appeared perfectly confounded; but his young host turned calmly to Miles.

"Tell Rory to bring it up," said he, and Miles withdrew.

"How much did you give for this animal, Mr. O'Hagan?" the minister inquired. "Was he expensive?"

"He's very expensive," sighed Barney. "He's cost me over fifty pounds, more or less."

"You're joking!"

"I'm not joking, I assure you! A curio like this dog is no joke! I've been fined time and again for the chickens and cats that dog has chased. I've been fined for exceeding the speed limit with my motor, when I was only running away from the

dog; I've been fined for abusive language towards the police, when I lost my temper because of the dog; and I've been obliged to double all the servants' wages, because they wouldn't remain here if I didn't, the keening of the dog is so lurid. It's simply appalling, that keening! It's like a drunken banshee! Did you ever hear a drunken banshee up North, Mr. McKenna?"

"I've never heard a banshee at all, drunk or sober," replied Mr. McKenna; "but I've heard the banshee boat, up in Dublin, and it's enough to make anyone get drunk, to drown the horror of it."

"I believe you," agreed Barney; "many a time, when I was a little lad, living in Sandymount, have I lain quaking in bed listening to that boat's despairing shrieks, until I could have screamed with nervous fear."

"I never knew that, Barney," exclaimed his father; "I wouldn't have let you be frightened. But didn't you know it was only a boat?"

"In the daytime—yes; but not at night, when everything was dark and still, and when my little, foolish head was full of weird stories about ghosts and banshees and such horrors."

"If the dog bays anything like that boat," said Mr. McKenna, decidedly, "I should advise shooting."

"But if it be a valuable dog?" said the priest; "what breed is it, Barney?"

"I don't think it's any particular canine breed, Father," said Barney, cautiously, "I should imagine

it to be a cross." The door opened, and Rory brought in the dog.

There was a blank silence; sheer amazement kept everyone dumb, while the ungainly animal itself stalked across the room over to its master.

"Don't let your feeling of politeness prevent you from hilarity," said Barney, calmly; "Bran and I are used to being laughed at; aren't we, old fellow?" He held out his hand and the dog laid its huge paws on his shoulders and licked his cheek.

"Well," observed Fr. O'Brien, "whatever its faults are, want of gratitude is certainly not one. Are dogs your favourite animals, Barney?"

"No, Father."

"Perhaps horses are," said Mr. McKenna; "that black one you rode to-day is a beautiful creature, Mr. O'Hagan."

"No," smiled Barney, "not horses either."

"You'll never guess," chuckled his father, "it's—cats!"

"Cats!" Everyone echoed the word incredulously.

Barney looked up quite calmly.

"Yes," said he, "cats; Kerry is a darling, and my wolf-dog, Finn, is a grand fellow, but I prefer cats."

"Have you a pet cat?" inquired the priest, much amused.

Barney smiled again, a curious, tender smile.

"No, Father," said he; "but I've got a very dear companion, that is very precious to me. Just

a little, gentle, faithful black cat, which I wouldn't part with for any price ! "

" I don't know much about cats," observed Mr. McKenna," so I can't judge fairly ; my favourite animals are dogs ; but unfortunately," he added, with a regretful sigh, " I prefer thoroughbred dogs, and they are ungettable ! "

" Would you take a puppy ? " asked Barney eagerly ; " I have a beauty, only waiting for a home ! A pure Scotch collie pup. Do take him, Mr. McKenna."

" I am exceedingly obliged to you," stammered the minister, greatly embarrassed, " but I don't think I could possibly accept such a —— "

" Rubbish ! " Barney interrupted, lightly. " You'd be doing me a favour by taking him ! I want him to be well cared for. I shall send him down to you as soon as I get home to Dublin."

He stood up as he spoke, and carefully brushed some of Bran's hair from his brat.

" I want to give Miles some orders about the motor," said he, going to the door ; then he paused, and smiled across at the minister.

" ' It's an ill wind that blows nobody good,' said he. " Bran, being ' onaisy in his mind,' has been the means of getting my puppy a good home."

" There's something royal in that sort of giving," said Major Hamilton, when Barney had gone out.

" But I feel simply overwhelmed ! " said the minister ; " I don't —— "

" You needn't," interposed Mr. O'Hagan.

" Barney enjoys giving; he loves to make others happy."

" A true follower of the Master," mused Fr. O'Brien, " who ' went about doing good.' "

" You said something just now, about your son's profession, Mr. O'Hagan," said the Major, " I don't quite understand."

" Oh, Barney has been called to the bar," answered Mr. O'Hagan, " but the only time he took up a case (though he's been offered many a one) was when a poor widow was being disgracefully and unjustly treated by her dead husband's people (robbed of her rights, in fact) and she had no money to pay a barrister. Barney was indignant over that business, I remember, and pleaded for her, and won the case. He refused to take a fee, although the grateful woman was most eager that he should."

Just then Barney himself returned.

" Father," said he to the priest, " Molly and Rory have made a crib, downstairs, and I'm certain they'd be highly honoured if you would come down and see it. It's really very pretty."

" With the greatest of pleasure ! " exclaimed Fr. O'Brien, pleased at Barney's thoughtfulness. " Our friends will excuse us, I'm sure."

" Certainly," said Mr. O'Hagan, " but don't stay too long away, Fr. John. We shall have some music, when you come back, if you will be so kind."

" I shall be delighted," responded the priest, smilingly, as he and Barney left the room together.

CHAPTER XIV

"UNTIL WE MEET AGAIN!"

"IS it really true that your son cares so much for cats?" asked Major Hamilton, as the door closed.

"Quite true. Even when a child, he was very fond of cats; but he got possession of this black cat in rather a pathetic manner."

"Do tell us how, Mr. O'Hagan!" exclaimed the Major, eagerly.

Mr. O'Hagan, nothing loth, lit a fresh cigar, and began his story.

"I heard the ins and outs of the business from four different people," he explained; "but I shall relate it to you in a more consecutive manner. You must know, then, that Barney is a most earnest worker for the poor. He is a member of the society of St. Vincent de Paul, and he joined a city branch because there is more ghastly, grinding poverty in the town than around the village of Dundrum, where we live. He visits the poorest and most squalid districts, places where I certainly would not go."

"Excuse my interrupting you," said the Major, "but I should have thought your son too fastidious for that kind of thing."

"You're perfectly right," returned Mr. O'Hagan,

" Barney is fastidious ; too much so, I'm afraid, sometimes. He shrinks from all the horrors he must necessarily see and hear when visiting the slums. But you see, he has an immense compassion for the poor, and, therefore, helps them all he can. The sick poor have his greatest sympathy, and it was when visiting a sick child he first saw the black cat. It was only a kitten then. The child, a little girl about six years old, was slowly dying. Nothing could save her, the doctor said. The father was a drunkard ; his unhappy wife was fast going down hill, too, and little Molly had been starved. Barney supplied the family with food, and he and the child became great friends. He talked to her, sang to her, told her stories ; and when she was too ill even for that, would sit beside the bed, holding her thin hand and stroking her forehead. Molly owned the kitten ; a poor, starved scrap of skin and bone it was, but Barney brought it food and milk, and the little animal was grateful. Every day for over a fortnight, Barney drove or motored from Dundrum into the city to see his little *protegee.* Many a time he stood between the wretched mother and her drunken husband's brutal blow, and many a time he sat beside Molly's bed for hours, letting her nestle in his arms, soothing her terror with tender words."

" Good heavens ! " exclaimed Major Hamilton, " what a ghastly picture ! "

" Yes ! " said the clergyman softly, " only for that benign figure by the bedside."

"One evening," continued Mr. O'Hagan, "Miles returned in the motor alone. Molly would not last the night, he told me, and she had begged with all her feeble strength for Barney to remain with her. It was a night of horror. The priest had been there earlier, and had tried to comfort the heart-broken mother. He had been able to hear Molly's confession, and had given her the Viaticum, thanks to Barney, who, during those two weeks had prepared the child's innocent soul to receive her Lord.

"Towards midnight the father returned, mad with drink. He attacked his wife, not knowing her, and would have killed her only for Barney, who had not been first in his college athletic sports for nothing. But the man was bigger than he, and like a wild beast besides, because of the drink, poor devil. The woman begged Barney to go, for her husband would murder him; but he flashed her a smile, she told me afterwards, and said cheerily: 'Not he! I'll win yet, never fear! God is with me!' He did win, but not before the brute had given him a bad time of it, and a vicious, dangerous wound on the cheek. Then Barney went to the child, who was gasping her tortured little life away, and, sitting down by the bed, he took her in his arms, soothing her with more than a woman's tenderness.

"So the night passed; he sat there patiently, listening to the low wails of the unhappy mother, and the curses of the half-crazed father. The kitten crept into Molly's arms, and at last the ex-

hausted child fell asleep. Towards morning she opened her eyes, and had just strength to put her two little thin arms around Barney's neck. 'Take care of the kitten for me,' she gasped, and he promised. Then she put her innocent lips to his, and he kissed her, and so she died, her small, white face laid against his."

Mr. O'Hagan paused suddenly, and cleared his throat. Neither of his listeners spoke. They were picturing in their minds the scene he had described to them: the squalid, dimly-lit room; the dying child nestling so confidently in the strong, gentle arms of her friend; the golden head bending low in such tender compassion!

"Barney brought the kitten home with him that day," Mr. O'Hagan went on after a pause, "and carefully washed it; ever since, it is just crazy over him, and he over it."

"I think, somehow, that there is a sequel to that story," observed the minister presently.

"There is, right enough! Barney helped the unhappy father and mother ——"

"He was a fool, then, to help the man!" interposed Major Hamilton, hotly. "He deserved jail, with hard labour! No punishment is too great for a fellow who tortures women or children!"

"Well," said Mr. O'Hagan, thoughtfully, "he certainly didn't get his deserts, at that rate. A week or so later, Barney and I were in the drawing-room together. He was playing the violin, because he was unable to go out, owing to the hurt to his face. It had given him a very great deal of

pain, and for nights he never slept. The dressing of it was simply torture; indeed, he was almost worn out, but he never complained. Suddenly the door opened unceremoniously, and our maid pushed in an unkempt, grimy figure, saying calmly: 'Master Barney is in there.' Then she shut the door, and went away. Barney stopped playing and glanced at the visitor; it was Molly's father!

"'I came here, sir,' he said, without even looking at Barney, 'because my missis told me—that—that when I had the dhrink on me—I—I nearly murdhered you—the night—Molly died. She says I hurt you—bad. Is—it—thrue, sir?' Barney was silent then said gently: 'You didn't know what you were doing! It doesn't matter now.' The man looked up then, and caught sight of Barney's disfigured face. With a strangled cry he dropped into a chair, his head buried in his hands. Barney laid down the violin, and going to the man put both hands on his heaving shoulders. He raised his head at the gentle touch, and looked at Barney; and oh, the shame, fear, contrition, and astonishment in that look! But the look that met his! I simply can't describe or explain it! I shall not even try! I didn't understand it then, nor never shall! There was something august in it, and Barney's young face seemed transfigured!"

"I understand," said Major Hamilton, softly; for he was thinking of the compassionate, gracious eyes which had looked down into his in the shadowy room the evening before.

"What passed between them," continued Mr.

O'Hagan, "only God knows; for I stole out, and left them alone together."

"And afterwards?" Mr. McKenna asked.

"Barney kept on helping the man and his wife. Again and again, the poor wretch failed, and again and again Barney helped him afresh. That went on for many, many months; but Barney never lost faith or hope, never grew weary, but stood by the poor weak fellow unflinchingly.

"'You had better give up, Barney,' I said to him once, 'it's useless!' But he set his lips and answered: 'I won't give up! I'm fighting for a soul; a soul which God Himself died for! Don't you see, I daren't give up! I must help to win that soul back to its Redeemer, and, with God's help, I shall!' And—he did!"

"Ah!" exclaimed the young clergyman, enthusiastically, "that's fine!"

"Did you happen to notice," asked Mr. O'Hagan, "the valet who took your coats in the hall?"

"I did, certainly," said the Major, "he seemed a very efficient servant."

"That's little Molly's father," remarked Mr. O'Hagan, calmly.

"That man!"

"Himself, and no other. He and Miles are ferociously jealous of each other, for both adore Barney. The man's wife is our cook at home, and a good cook she is, too."

For a few moments the three men were silent. At length Bran got up, and went to the door, for he had heard his master's step outside. Barney

and Fr. O'Brien came in almost immediately, Barney who was first, of course, fell over the waiting dog.

"There you are again!" exclaimed the young man, in resigned tones, "just exactly where you ought not to be!" Then he patted the dog's head and gazed in surprise at the silent trio.

"Fr. John," said he, "don't let us interrupt this highly interesting and cheerful conversation! Come with me, and I'll show you ——"

"Come back, this instant!" his father called after him, as he and the priest were sauntering away, arm in arm; "and don't be giving us any of your monkey tricks!"

"Really!" exclaimed Barney in mock surprise, "that's no way to speak to a priest!"

His father got red.

"I wasn't speaking to the priest," he snapped, "I was speaking to you."

"Oh, anything is good enough for me," sighed Barney.

Mr. O'Hagan positively glared.

"We are waiting for some music," he said, icily.

"You all looked as if you were waiting for execution," rejoined Barney.

"I have heard that you play the violin," said Major Hamilton, as his young host held the door open.

"Don't heed all you hear, sir," was the tantalising reply.

"Oh!" exclaimed the other, obviously disap-

pointed, "I understood from your father that you play."

"And so he does!" cried Mr. O'Hagan, "he plays the fiddle just as well as he plays the fool, and that's well enough, isn't it?'"

"Fancy calling a genuine Strad a fiddle!" Barney exclaimed, in disgusted tones, as he stirred the drawing-room fire to a brighter blaze.

"I sometimes wonder," said Mr. O'Hagan, as he lit the candles at the piano, "why I spared the rod when Barney was a child!"

"Do you think he's spoilt?" smiled the priest.

"I'm sure of it, Fr. John."

"I think he's just the reverse," said the priest, softly.

With one accord they looked across at Barney. He was standing on the hearthrug, gazing into the leaping flames, an indescribably wistful expression on his young face. He was unconscious of everything only his own thoughts. What did he see in the glowing heart of the fire? A gentle, winsome face, and two dear eyes, love-lit and true. And then the face faded, and in its place came the gleam of a little, golden door, with a red lamp burning before it.

"Barney!" called out his father, "that's a nice way you're entertaining your visitors!"

Barney started, and looked round in rather a bewildered fashion. Then he flushed crimson.

"I beg your pardon!" he stammered, very much confused.

"Don't mind your father, Barney," said the

priest, going to the piano and softly playing a few chords.

"What a lovely tone!" he murmured rapturously.

Mr. McKenna sat down near him, but the Major crossed over to his favourite. His keen hazel eyes were wonderfully tender as they rested on Barney's troubled face.

"I'm afraid," said Barney, with the ingenuous smile that Major Hamilton was learning to love, "that my father's reproof was well deserved. I was in a reverie."

"If every host were like you and your father," returned the Major, "I should soon cease being a recluse, Barney."

A gleam of intense pleasure and satisfaction flashed into Barney's eyes. He knew the compliment was genuine, coming, as it did, from the lips of this critical, reserved soldier. And he noticed that the Major had unconsciously addressed him by his Christian name, and felt curiously glad.

"What kind of pictures did you see in the fire?" the Major asked. "Judging by your face, they were sad, I should think."

"They were sober ones," Barney told him, with a faint sigh.

"A woman's face, I suppose," mused the Major.

"More a child's face than a woman's," said Barney softly.

Here Bran created a diversion by rushing wildly into the room. As the carpet had been taken up for the Christmas party, and as the floor was very highly polished, the mat on which he bounded

went slithering away at a great rate across the room.

" Oh, I say ! " remonstrated Barney, in dismay, as the huge animal crashed up against a music stand, and then turned a delirious somersault in the air ; " you really must not come skimmandering in here after that fashion ! And that mat is not to be used as a helter-skelter, nor is this room a bear garden ! "

" If I were you," remarked Major Hamilton, with cold disapproval, " I should teach that dog to behave properly."

Barney sighed, and the dog picked itself up with a most astonished expression.

" I admit," said Barney, " that his behaviour is eccentric. Kindly go away, Bran ! You're disgracing me by such conduct."

" Oh, do let him stay ! " implored Mr. O'Hagan, " or he may start that infernal Banshee wail again."

Barney looked dubious.

" But perhaps he will object to the music," said he.

" Try him," suggested the minister, " play something, Fr. O'Brien."

The priest obligingly complied with this request, and the effect on Bran was most unexpected. He stalked over to the piano, and sat down beside it, watching intently the priest's fingers as they flew over the keys.

Fr. O'Brien became embarrassed, and the absurdity of the situation suddenly flashed on Barney, whose sense of the ridiculous was exquisitely keen.

His joyous laugh rang through the room, and the other three men, after vain endeavours to keep serious, were compelled to join in.

Fr. O'Brien grew desperate and played *Bravura* and *Largo* and *Presto* with reckless impartiality. But the wilder he became and the more appalling the din he made, so much the more did Bran enjoy it! Finally the almost frenzied musician began the most delirious *Glisser* up and down the piano, with both hands, and with the loud pedal down! Bran cocked his ears, and edged closer, nodding his head as if saying, "That's the ticket! Encore!" But the priest did not give an encore; on the contrary, he stopped suddenly, completely exhausted, and wiped his heated face with his handkerchief. Then he swung round on the music stool, and calmly surveyed the company. Mr. O'Hagan, the minister, and Major Hamilton were trying their level best to stop laughing, but Barney made no effort to check his mirth, and his laughter was becoming hysterical. Then the priest spoke, with the gentlest irony, and with a humorous twinkle in his eyes.

"I regret, exceedingly," said he, "that I am unable to continue amusing you all! But my nerves won't stand any more. When a child, I have enjoyed many a circus, but I always felt rather sorry for the clown. Now, I positively pity him!"

"You're—a powerful—player—Father!" gasped Barney, "I shan't need to see the Christmas pantomime in Dublin after this!"

"I think," observed the priest, looking at Barney, whose head was buried in the sofa cushion, "that there's another as well as that misguided gollywog of a dog, who ought to be taught manners."

"Do you hear that now, Barney!" exclaimed Mr. O'Hagan, "you're disgracing yourself and your father before the parish priest."

But Barney's self-control had completely deserted him, so the Major came to Fr. O'Brien's assistance.

"Bran," said he, "come here, sir!"

The dog obeyed, and crossed to the Major's chair.

"Sit down," commanded the Major, and Bran at once sat down, resting his great head on his new friend's knee, and watching him with deep, sombre eyes.

Barney raised his head.

"Won't you—play—something else, Father?" he said, in rather a quivering voice.

"Certainly!" returned the priest, instantly; "but not because you asked me, Barney! I'll play to please the only person in the room who was kind enough to assist me."

"We were all laughing, Father," protested Barney.

"Oh! you needn't tell me!" exclaimed the priest. "Didn't I hear you all? But everyone only yourself tried to stop, and that's the difference."

He began to play as he spoke, and almost imperceptibly there stole into the room the faint footfalls of many men, coming nearer and nearer. Gradually the steady, incessant tramp grew louder,

till the whole room vibrated to the pulsing rhythm. And then the travellers passed by, and fainter and fainter came the echo of their marching feet, till it died into the golden silence whence it had come. And so Wagner's "Pilgrims" came and went!

At length the Major spoke.

"Words are poor things, Fr. O'Brien," he said, "with which to express gratitude for such music as that; so—I shall not use any."

The priest smiled, glad that he had given the old soldier such pleasure, and Mr. O'Hagan addressed his son.

"It's your turn to do something, now," said he.

"It isn't," contradicted Barney, "it's yours."

"Major Hamilton wishes to hear you play the violin!"

"I can't," Barney answered, "I'm used up! Between Bran and Fr. John, I feel like a bewildered barley stack."

"None of your nonsense, Barney!" his father warned him. "Get up, this instant."

Barney got up obediently, and took his violin; then he selected a piece of music, and handed it to Fr. O'Brien.

"We'll have some more of Wagner," said he, delicately tuning his Strad as he spoke, "'Lohengrin.' I'm telling you all beforehand that it's 'Lohengrin,' because by the time the pair of us have finished with it, you may not be able to realise it's 'Lohengrin!' In fact, you may not

be in a fit state to realise anything! Like the renowned Banquo, you may ask yourselves the question, 'can such things be?'"

He bent his fair head over the violin, and drew the bow over the open strings. Major Hamilton gave a sigh of contentment, and sank back in his chair; for those firm, sweet, perfect notes had proved that a master hand held the bow.

And then the Strad began to sing! It sang with incredible sweetness the immortal Swan Song; it sang of Elsa's dream, and of her trust in God's eternal love; it sobbed with her in her sorrow, and laughed with her in her joy; it sang the peerless melody of the Holy Grail, and Lohengrin's triumphant vindication of his name: "The Son of Parsifal, Knight of the Holy Grail." But before the last sublime note had died away, the faint, haunting echo of the mysterious Swan Song crept into the room. Then the little Strad whispered in dulcet tones the relentless magic call to Lohengrin! Nearer and nearer it came, claiming the Knight of the Holy Grail to keep his patient vigil once again!

"Father," said Barney, as he paused, the bow still in his hand; "you and Sadie are the only two who play my accompaniments to please me."

"Well, but that's a great compliment!" exclaimed the priest; "and now get me some songs, Barney, and I'll please you with them, too."

Barney smilingly complied, and sang song after song with untiring willingness. He even persuaded

the retiring Mr. McKenna to sing "Excelsior!" with him, because the Major had remarked that he liked the song very much.

"You three fellows can join in, when we come to the refrain, "Excelsior! Excelsior!'" Barney said, quite calmly; "I mean," he added hastily, "you three gentlemen."

"But we three fellows don't know it!" remonstrated his father.

"That will sound all the funnier," returned Barney cheerfully. "If you knew it, it wouldn't be funny at all!"

"But it's not a funny song!" protested the Major, quite aghast at the idea.

"It will be, when we've sung it!" Barney chuckled.

The fastidious Major was really afraid that his irrepressible young host would ruin the song, but Barney was too true an artist. He and the minister did full justice to the beautiful melody.

At about ten o'clock coffee was served; but when Mr. O'Hagan looked round for his son, he saw that he and the priest were having a heated discussion at the piano.

"For goodness sake," he called out, "stop that argument, and have some coffee!"

"How do you know we were arguing?" asked Barney.

"Because wherever you are, there's bound to be an argument!"

"That's right," sighed Barney, coming over to the table; "blame me for everything! It was

Fr. John who started it, talking such nonsense about a semi-demi-semi —— "

" Carry that cup of coffee over to Fr. O'Brien, and don't be so silly," interposed Mr. O'Hagan.

" Certainly ; but don't get abusive over a mere note ! It isn't worth it."

" Where are the biscuits ? " demanded Mr. O'Hagan, who felt strongly tempted to throw something at his son's head.

" They're inside Bran," replied Barney.

" You don't mean to say he's eaten two pounds of the best rich mixed biscuits ? " gasped Mr. O'Hagan.

" I'm afraid he has," admitted Barney ; " but he didn't know they were the best biscuits."

Mr. O'Hagan was speechless with indignation ; but the three visitors laughed outright.

" What were you and Fr. O'Brien arguing about ? ' asked the Major presently.

" About a semi-demi-semi-breve," Barney answered.

" But there's no such note in music ! " exclaimed the minister.

" Of course not," agreed Barney ; " that's why we argued about it."

" You're simply preposterous, Barney," observed Fr. O'Brien, " and make me as preposterous as yourself."

" Fr. John said," continued Barney, " that if the note were there, it would be a semi-demi-semi-breve ; and I said that if it were a semi-demi-semi-breve, it wouldn't be correct, and, therefore,

couldn't be there at all! Now, which of us is right, Mr. McKenna?"

"I'm afraid," said the minister feebly, "that I'm in a fog!"

"You are not, you're in a fix; and you'll be in a fit, if you're not careful."

"In the name of commonsense," the Major demanded indignantly, "why argue over a note which isn't there, and couldn't be?"

Barney opened his eyes, as if astonished.

"If the note were there," said he, "we'd see it, and there'd be nothing to argue about!"

"Barney," said his father, "you're a bigger fool than I thought you were. Go over to the organ beyond, and sing something else."

"I'm tired singing," pleaded Barney.

"So are we tired, listening to you; but it's better to hear you singing than arguing. Sing 'The Lost Chord,' a vic."

Barney sighed, but obeyed instantly; and then Fr. O'Brien asked for an *Ave Maria*.

"First you get me into hot water, and then you expect me to sing for you, Father," protested Barney.

"You'd be in hot water in any case," chuckled the priest.

"I'm never out of it," groaned Barney; but he sang the *Ave Maria*, and every note of his young, reverent voice brought a greater peace to the Major's troubled soul.

So in music and conversation the night passed all too quickly, and it was with the most genuine

regret that the guests at last stood up to take their leave.

" After this," sighed Mr. McKenna, " I'll always sympathise with children when they are obliged to go to bed."

Everyone laughed ; but Mr. O'Hagan and his son keenly appreciated the frank, sincere compliment.

" It's a strange thing that my carriage hasn't come," remarked the Major, as they stood in the hall, donning coats and hats.

" It would be a stranger thing if it did come," said Barney, who was holding the priest's coat.

" Why ? ' asked the Major, rather surprised.'

" Because I told the coachman not to come ! "

The Major positively glared.

" That's the second time you contradicted my orders to my man ! " he said, quite sharply.

" Well, it won't be the last time," chuckled Barney, quite unabashed.

" How am I to get home ? " demanded the Major.

" There are two motors out there, sir," said Barney.

" But who will drive the second one ? " asked his father.

" I will," answered Barney, flushing a little, however, as he spoke.

Mr. O'Hagan looked surprised ; but Barney calmly pulled on his heavy motor coat, and descended the snowy steps. Each of the three visitors was curious to know who was the favoured

one whom their young host meant to drive himself, and each one was keenly anxious for the privilege; but the privilege was reserved for Major Hamilton.

"You see," remarked Barney, with a comical look, "I want to end the Old Year well by trying to convert this very obstinate soldier, and make him behave less like a bear. That's the reason I'm driving him home."

Mr. O'Hagan groaned, and glanced at the Major; but that gentleman only smiled grimly.

"Suppose I refuse to go home with you?" he inquired.

"You won't refuse," replied Barney promptly, "I defy you to!"

The Major got into the smaller car, looking still more grim.

"May I take Bran, Major Hamilton?" asked Barney, wistfully. "He wants to come."

"Certainly," returned the Major politely; and the ungainly animal immediately got into the car and sat down in a dignified manner.

A cheery good-bye was exchanged between Mr. O'Hagan and his guests, and then the two cars glided softly down the snowy drive. At the gate they parted company, and many a kindly God-speed gladdened the night air.

"What was your real reason for coming out to-night?" asked the Major presently, as the little car swung along the moon-lit road.

Barney coloured and smiled. It was evident that his usual gay *insouciance* had deserted him.

" I—would rather not tell you," he admitted at length.

" You must, in common justice, after what you told the others ! " averred the Major.

Barney laughed blithely.

" I was only joking ! " he exclaimed, and then he added more soberly : " I—I thought you—would like me—to come." The young man stumbled over his words, for somehow he felt extraordinarily shy.

" You thought quite right," was all the Major said ; yet Barney felt well repaid for his little sacrifice.

But when the car stopped at Coolcrannach, and Barney sprang out and held the door open, the Major put both hands on the young man's shoulders, and looked long and wistfully into the frank, kindly eyes and comely face.

" This last half hour," said he, " has been the happiest time of a very happy evening ! " and, as the young man flushed with pleasure, he added slowly : " Good-night—Good-bye ! "

He drew Barney towards him, and kissed the broad forehead, where the golden curls rested so lightly.

" Good-night," Barney answered softly, " God be with you ! "

THE END

Printed by M. H. Gill & Son, Ltd., *Dublin.*

BOSTON COLLEGE
3 9031 027 90731 0